

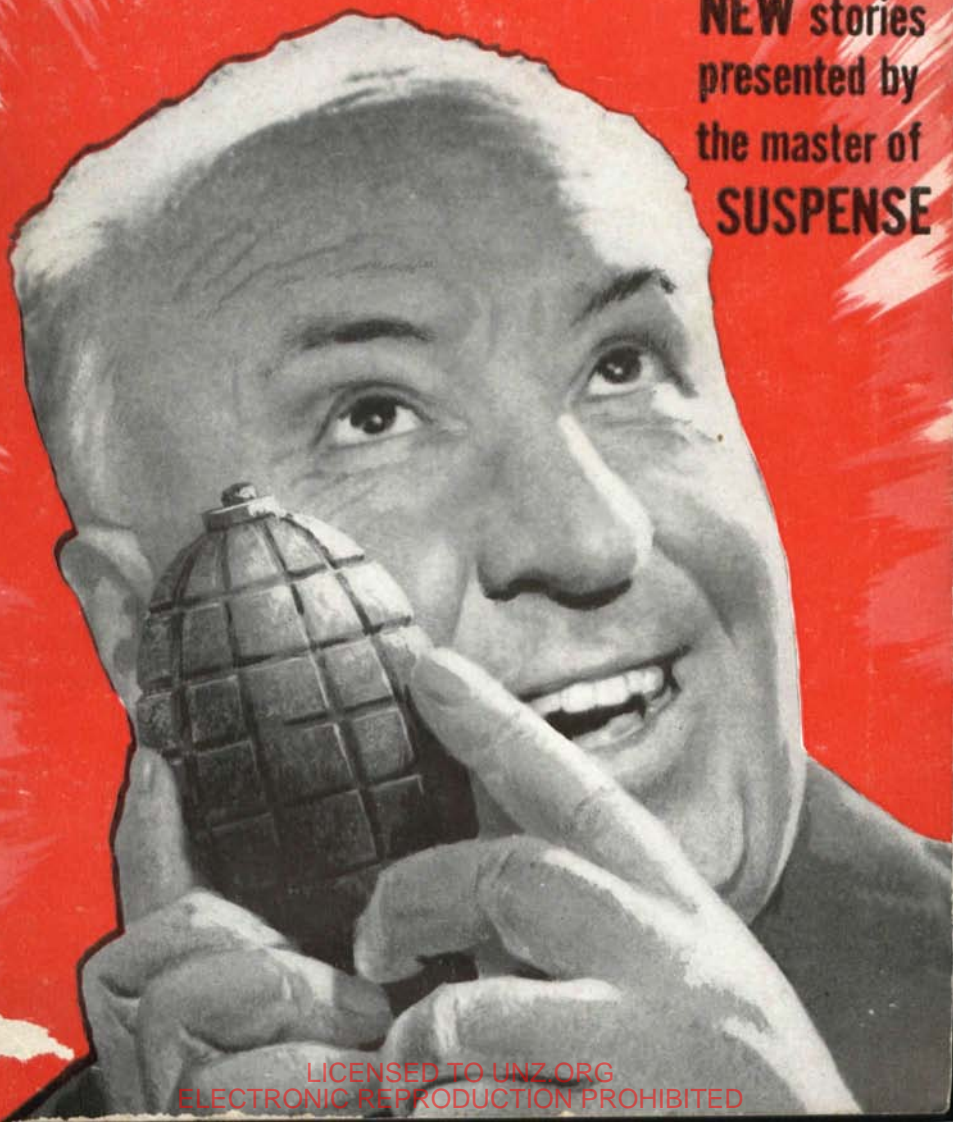
ALFRED

JULY 35¢ K

HITCHCOCK'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NEW stories
presented by
the master of
SUSPENSE



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Dear Readers,

Many of you, understandably, have inquired as to the role of the movie director in contemporary picture making. I maintain that my first task is to produce a film which will keep my audience awake; I then strive to arrest handfuls of popcorn, throughout the theatres of our land, midway between paper bag and mouth.

To accomplish all this, I arrive punctually on the set, my bright brown eyes inordinately bright. They note instantaneously that no actors are present. But the cleaning woman is on hand, and so I direct her through the labyrinthian intricacies of emptying my wastepaper basket. It is soon plain that she is a method actress, with a method uniquely her own. Finally, actors begin to straggle in, wagging their temperaments, as it were, behind them. During the long shooting day, I show one, who must escape from the villain, how to vault over a wall with an agility that suggests the gazelle by actually vaulting over the wall myself with an agility suggesting the gazelle. Or perhaps a hand grenade needs to be caressed, as they often do. You would be astounded at the number of stars in the cinema firmament who don't even know how to begin so simple a task. And so it goes, scene in and scene out.

I trust that my enthralling profession is no longer a mystery to any of you. This has, of course, been presented as a public service.

Alfred Hitchcock

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ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

CONTENTS

NO NAME, ADDRESS, IDENTITY <i>by William Link and Richard Levinson</i>	2
UNDER DIM STREET LIGHTS <i>by Jack Ritchie</i>	10
A VERY CAUTIOUS BOY <i>by Gilbert Ralston</i>	20
MURDER OUT OF A HAT <i>by Henry Slesar</i>	30
DEAD DRUNK <i>by Bryce Walton</i>	41
DOUBLY MISSING <i>by Glenn Andrews</i>	50
A HOUSE IS A PLUM <i>by Donald Honig</i>	65
ONCE UPON A BANK FLOOR . . . <i>by James Holding</i>	70
ROBOT WITH A GUN <i>by Mann Rubin</i>	80
FINAL ARRANGEMENTS <i>by Lawrence Page</i>	88
LOVING AND DEADLY <i>by Michael Zuroy</i>	94
THE COST OF KENT CASTWELL <i>by Avram Davidson</i>	104
THE AFFAIR UPSTAIRS <i>by Helen Nielsen</i>	114

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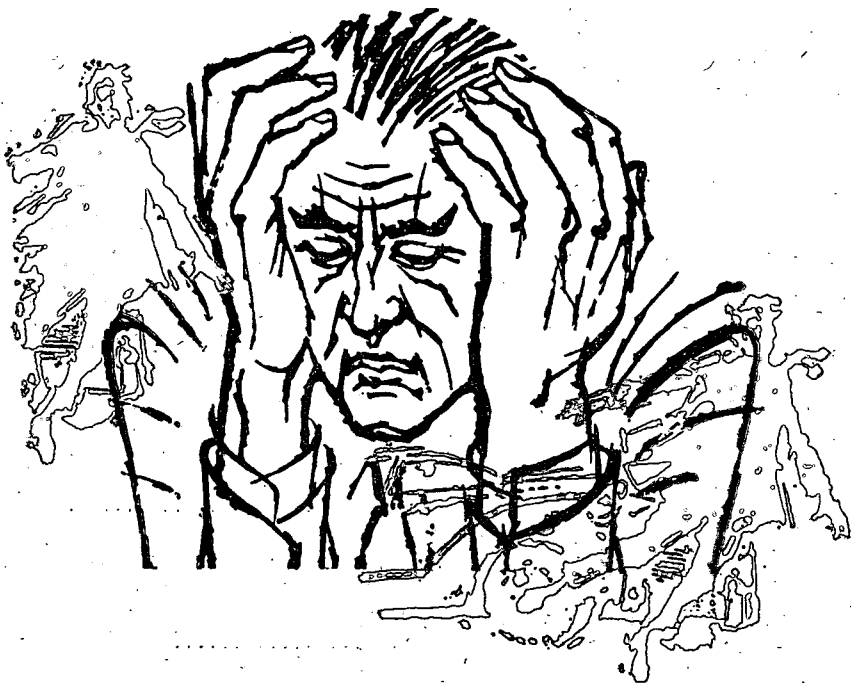
WILLIAM MANNERS, Editorial Director

PAT HITCHCOCK, Associate Editor

G. F. FOSTER, Managing Editor

LISA BELKNAP, Associate Editor

MEINRAD MAYER, Art Director



THERE was a jolt, a tremendous and brutal impact, and for a fraction of a second the young man's senses turned topsy-turvy. The sun suddenly seemed to be below him and the sky, spinning over his head, became asphalt. He plunged into the street, rolled, and landed with his cheek against the rough edge of the curb.

"Somebody help that man!" screamed a woman.

"I saw it!" cried another voice. "Hit and run! Get the license number!"

He became dimly aware that he was surrounded by people. The sky had righted itself and a ring of concerned faces hung over his head. Painfully, he pushed himself to his knees.

"Better not move, pal." This from a truck driver type in a leather windbreaker. "They're gettin' a cop now. He'll call an ambulance."

"No," he said. "No, I'm—I'm all right." He started getting unsteadily to his feet.

"I saw it all," said a woman proudly. "You were crossing the

No Name, Address, Identity

by William Link and Richard Levinson

street and that car hit a puddle of water. Skidded right into you. Then took off like I don't know what."

"Sure you're okay?" The truck driver again.

"I don't think it's wise to move," added an elderly woman in a mink coat. "You might have broken something."

"Just—knocked the wind out of me," the young man said, on his feet now. "I'm fine," he added, forcing a smile.

They stood there watching him until someone handed him his hat. "Well . . . thanks," he said awkwardly. "Now if you'll . . . excuse me. I have an appointment."

They moved back, opening a corridor so that he could pass. He walked through them, testing every step, but there was no sharp signal of discomfort to indicate a

fracture or even a sprain. His head was bruised and his hand was cut, but that was all.

When he was a few blocks away he paused to light a cigarette. Well, I must lead a charmed life, he thought. Knocked down by some maniac and no damage done. I could have been killed. He patted himself again, in wonderment. Then he decided he'd better hurry; he had to keep his appointment.

What appointment?

It suddenly occurred to him that he didn't know who he was, hadn't the faintest idea.

The young man stopped, quelling a momentary surge of panic. Of course he knew who he was. A name just doesn't drop out of the mind. He was . . . he was . . .

Well, it would come to him. He was just a little rattled by the accident. Shock, maybe. A temporary

I have yet to see a pedestrian run down a car. Of course, I haven't really been watching too long for such an occurrence. And now that the compacts are with us, it is not unlikely that a stout-hearted pedestrian will one day bend at the waist, exceed the speed limit, and indulge in a head-on collision.

lapse of memory. He snapped his cigarette away and started walking again, concentrating. But nothing came. He couldn't even decide if he had been on this street or in this city before. He paused in front of a shop window and studied his reflection. Well, it was an average face, a face he must have seen every day for close to thirty-five years. But it was totally unfamiliar.

This is ridiculous, he thought. Something you read in the newspapers. He had been crossing the street, minding his own business, and by some blunder of fate a skidding car had snatched away his powers of recollection. Amnesia. Like something on the Late Late Show. He didn't even know what he did for a living. A lawyer? A businessman? And where did he live? Was he rich or poor, married or single?

His wallet! There'd be identification in his wallet. The young man plunged his hands into his pockets, but there was nothing except a key ring, cigarettes, and some change. He patted his back pocket. Nothing. Just a handkerchief.

But that was impossible. Surely, whoever he was, he carried a wallet. Unless . . . He looked back over his shoulder. Unless he had dropped it during the confusion of the accident. He'd better go back and try to find it.

He started to retrace his steps, but before he had gone a block, he realized he was lost. Had he made a right turn or a left? Was it down this street or two blocks away? There were no landmarks to guide him; nothing looked familiar, yet nothing looked strange. He finally stopped, helpless, and began another frantic search of his clothing.

Jacket pockets, nothing. Trouser pockets, nothing. Inside jacket pocket. . . . His groping fingers touched something and, eagerly, he pulled it out. Then, stunned, he stared at what he held in his hand. It was a stiff, new, thousand-dollar bill, and wrapped around it was a sheet of notepaper. There was writing on the paper and he unfolded it.

"Dr. Ralph Mannix
Medical Building
23 West 86th"

Mannix, Mannix. He felt no response to the name; no note of memory was struck. But it was the only clue he had. He hurried to the corner and looked up at the street sign. West 79th. Well, he was seven blocks away. He stuffed the bill back in his pocket and started walking, faster and faster, until he was actually running. People glanced at him, wondering at his haste, but he didn't care.

When he came into the waiting room, the receptionist was busy

typing. She finished a sentence, threw the carriage, and swiveled to face him. "May I help—" she began, then stopped.

The young man stood just inside the doorway, out of breath. The look on her face made him conscious of his torn suit and bruised forehead.

She cleared her throat. "May I help you?"

"Is Doctor Mannix in?" he said.

"Yes, but he's leaving for the day. Do you have an appointment?"

He paused. "I . . . don't know."

"I beg your pardon."

"Look, just buzz him. It's important."

"I'm sorry, but I'll have to have your name."

"Lady, if I knew my name I wouldn't be here."

He watched her study him for a moment. Then, apparently sensing the urgency in his manner, she picked up the phone and rang the inner office. "A gentleman here to see you, Doctor."

A few seconds later a door opened and Doctor Mannix looked out. He was an older man, with hair gone gray at the temples and pink, freckled hands. His eyes, behind the sharp circles of his glasses, were tranquil. In a pleasant voice he said, "Yes?"

The young man crossed the room quickly. "Doctor Mannix?"

"That's right."

"Doctor, do you—do you know who I am?" Having said it, he felt like a fool. "I mean, have you ever met me before?"

The Doctor seemed puzzled. "No, I don't believe so. Why?"

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. And that's a nasty cut on your head. I'd better have a look at it."

The young man touched his temple and his hand came away with a trace of red.

"It's opened up and needs attention. Come inside." Mannix stepped into the other room and indicated a leather chair near a window. "Sit down and I'll be right with you." He disappeared into an alcove, still talking. "My nurse just left a few minutes ago. We were closing up shop for the day."

The young man dropped into the chair and massaged his eyes. He looked from the framed diplomas on the wall to the gathering darkness in the sky outside the window. He was depressed and tired, but he was afraid to allow himself to doze. The whole incident might take place again in some corner of his mind—the jolt, the feeling of falling through space, and then the hard edge of the curb against his cheek.

Mannix returned with a bottle of alcohol and a wad of cotton. "This

will sting, but it'll fix you up." He bent down and swabbed the wound, adjusting his glasses and examining it critically. "No stitching necessary. You're lucky it wasn't deeper." He went to a metal table, pulled out a drawer, and came up with a roll of bandages. "I'd rather let the air at it, but it's not very pretty to look at. So—" With sure, strong motions he pressed the dressing over the cut and stepped back. "There. Good as new."

The young man ran a tentative finger along the bandage. "I guess I really got knocked around," he said. "That's why it happened."

"Why what happened?"

The young man hesitated for a moment, then he sighed. "I may as well tell you," he said. "I can't remember who I am."

Mannix studied him, then capped the bottle of alcohol and set it on the metal table. He moved behind his desk and sat down, elbows on the blotter, his fingers laced. He didn't say anything.

"Look, I know this sounds crazy, but about an hour ago I was crossing the street and a car smashed into me." The young man dug into his pocket for a cigarette. "Some damn fool was driving, I guess. He skidded, clipped me, and then took off like a rocket. Didn't even stop to see if I was hurt."

"Anyone get the license number?"

"No. There was too much excitement. I was hit and the next thing I knew there was a crowd around me. Somebody was going for an ambulance and everybody was yelling not to touch me. I felt all right, though—a little cut up, but no bones broken." The young man lit the cigarette and exhaled smoke. His throat was dry. "Anyway, I got to my feet and told them I wasn't hurt. I wanted to get out of there. Crowds make me nervous."

The door opened and the receptionist looked in. "I'm leaving now, Doctor. Unless you need me."

"No. I'll see you in the morning, Miss Sherman." She closed the door softly and Mannix picked a letter opener from his desk. He toyed with it absently, balancing it between his fingers. "Were you aware of striking your head with any force?" he asked.

"It happened so fast I didn't have a chance to notice. One minute I was crossing the street, the next I felt this thing smash into me."

"What happened then?"

The young man explained about his walk and his sudden feeling of panic when he realized he couldn't remember his name. The Doctor listened carefully, then be-

gan to nod. "Temporary amnesia," he said.

"Are you positive?"

"Just about. Temporary amnesia is produced by shock or a sharp blow." He got up and took the young man's wrist. He glanced at his watch, as he continued to hold the wrist. "Your pulse is normal. Any headache, dizziness, or nausea?"

"No, nothing like that."

"You might have a slight concussion. It's difficult to tell without X-ray and a complete examination." The Doctor looked at him. "Why did you come to me, by the way?"

"That's the funny part. When I searched my pockets all I found was a thousand dollar bill. And wrapped around it was a piece of paper with your name and address on it."

The Doctor was surprised. "My name?"

"That's right. At first I thought I might be you, I mean that I might be Doctor Mannix. And I figured if I wasn't, you'd probably know who I was. Why else would I have your name in my pocket? So I came over here."

"This is most peculiar. I'm sure I've never seen you before. Perhaps a patient of mine gave you the name and address."

The young man stubbed his cig-

arette into an ashtray. "The question is, what do I do now?"

Mannix thought for a moment. "I suppose you should go to the police. Tell them what happened and have them publish your photograph in the paper. If you have any relatives in town, they'll see it and come for you." He reached for the phone. "I'll call them and have them send a car."

"No." The young man held up his hand. He was annoyed. "Look, I don't want to make a thing out of this. All I want is to remember my name. I thought you could help me."

"The best way is for me to call up the—"

The young man stood up, slapping his fist irritably against his palm. "This is ridiculous. You know that? I keep thinking I'm dreaming. A thousand-dollar bill and no name." He wheeled on the Doctor. "Can it go away? I mean, can I get my memory back?"

"Sometimes the lapse lasts only a few hours. Once in a while something makes a connection and the mind returns to normal. But it's difficult to say. The only sure way is treatment. If you'll just let me—"

The young man stared at a framed photograph on the desk. "Who's that?" he asked.

Puzzled, Mannix glanced at the picture. "My wife. Why?"

"I don't know. Maybe—I wonder if I have a wife."

"If you do, she's probably worried. Now listen to me. Let me call the police and go down there with you. They have doctors. We can give you a thorough examination. Besides they may have had inquiries."

The young man wasn't paying attention. He went over to the window and looked out. "This is the weirdest thing," he said. "The weirdest thing." He turned apologetically. "Look, I'm sorry I bothered you. I guess you want to go home."

Before Mannix could protest, the young man made an abrupt motion of farewell and headed for the door. "I'll work this out," he called back over his shoulder. "Don't worry."

"But listen—"

"I'll be fine." He walked hurriedly through the waiting room and out into the empty corridor, relieved to be alone. He had been nervous in the Doctor's office; it was almost as bad as when he was lying on his back an hour ago with a ring of curious faces hanging over him. Besides, his head was beginning to throb.

He pressed the elevator button and concentrated on the floor in-

dicator as it traveled in a slow arc. For some reason the photograph of the Doctor's wife floated before his eyes terribly annoying in its familiarity.

And then, quite suddenly, he remembered who he was.

The elevator doors slid open, then closed, but he remained where he was, marveling at the surge of recollection that filled his brain. Everything had come back to him, he was himself again, and he began to laugh as he about-faced and walked towards the Doctor's office.

Mannix was just turning out the lights when he came in. "Doctor, this is really amazing, but it hit me while I was waiting for the elevator. It happened all of a sudden, like a flash."

"You mean your memory came back?"

"Everything." The young man was elated. "I even know where the thousand bucks came from."

"Really?"

"Your wife gave it to me."

"My wife?" The Doctor's eyes widened behind his glasses.

"Sure," said the young man, reaching for the long, metal letter opener on the desk. He smiled. "That's what she paid me to kill you."

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THERE were about thirty or forty of them outside under the dim street lights. They were leaning against things—against their beat-up cars, against dark store fronts, against the elm trees—and they were looking this way and talking.

But that's all they were doing now.

I moved away from the window.

Jed Tracy was cleaning one of the rifles from the rack. They were all whistle-clean, but it was something for him to do. "It's been about ten years since this town's had a lynching," he said.

I took a seat at my desk and lit a cigarette.

There were a couple of shouts outside, but they didn't mean anything. They weren't pointed this way.

Jed listened, too, and then fitted a rifle patch into the rod slot. "You worried, Sheriff?"

"No."

"Why not? There's plenty of men out there."

I shrugged. "A good dog fight could draw them away. They don't need a lynching for entertainment.

They'll drink a little more and maybe they'll whip themselves up to knocking at the door. But that's it. From then on they back down." I watched Jed. "Suppose they try to get Randall? What are you going to do? Invite them in?"

He inspected the bore against the light. "I got a deputy's badge and I got a duty. You don't have to worry about me."

My phone rang and I picked it up. It was long distance from the State capitol.

"Sheriff Bragan?"

"That's right."

"This is Governor Hassett. I understand that you might be having some trouble up there?"

"No trouble."

There were a few seconds of silence. "I had a phone call from a woman in your town. Teaches school there. She said that it looked as though there might be a . . ." He was reluctant to use the word.

"A lynching."

"There won't be."

"Well . . . she said that people are congregating all around the jail."

Of an evening, individuals should stay at home and partake of a good mystery. Living vicariously via the printed word, you will find, is considerably less trouble. So the next time you've been invited to participate in a mob, do consider my recommendation.

UNDER

DIM

STREET

LIGHTS

by Jack Ritchie

"A few of them. But nothing I can't take care of."

He was probably rubbing his chin. "Suppose I send a half a dozen State troopers up there? Just to make sure?"

"I can handle everything up here.

We don't take too kindly to outside interference."

The governor understood that. We were hill people, a little queer and poor, but we voted.

"Just what kind of a—ah—crime was committed?"

"A man got drunk in a bar and killed another man."

The governor was relieved. "Good." He quickly corrected himself. "I mean, I'm rather glad—for the State—that it isn't one of those—well, you know—some types of crimes get people more excited than others."

"It wasn't."

"Now you're positive you won't need any help? We don't want any more bad publicity for our State, you know."

"I won't need any help."

"Good. But be sure to call if things look at all bad."

"I will." I waited until he hung up and then put down the phone. "That was the governor."

Jed slipped the bolt back into the rifle. "So you can handle everything?"

I studied him. "You don't like being just the deputy, do you? You figure you should be wearing my badge?"

He looked up. "I was the deputy when Parks retired. The town didn't have to pass me over. So I take a drink now and then. Who doesn't? And if *you* don't like it, why don't you fire me?"

"I like somebody intelligent to talk to."

He glared. "I was born in the hills, but that don't mean I got no brains."

"It doesn't?"

"I was a lieutenant in the Korean War," he snapped. "A field promotion. I didn't have to have no education. And before that I was a sergeant."

"I'm sure your mother was proud of you."

His face was almost purple now. "I was a leader. My men would have followed me to hell."

"Just to see that you really got there?"

The rifle rod bent in his hands. "You think you're so much better than the rest of us because you left a few years and went to college. Why did you come back anyway? Because you sometimes get invited to the big house on the hill?"

Yes, that was why I had come back. Because of the big house on the hill and Helen Randall who lived there. She had been a freshman and I had been a senior and there is a democracy on the college campus that cuts across economic lines. And I knew she had wanted me to come back.

Now her brother Philip called from his cell for another cup of water.

I filled a tin cup and brought it to him.

Randall didn't look too improved after three hours in a cell. The bruises on his face were dark now and he still hadn't bothered

to brush the dirt from his tuxedo.

He gulped the water. "When do I get out of this hole, Bragan?"

"This isn't a traffic offense."

He laughed shortly. "You're talking to Philip Randall, Bragan. I own this town."

"You own the mines."

"Same thing. Have you heard from Carson?"

"No."

Carson was his lawyer and he was out trying to do his best for Randall.

Randall pulled a digarette out of a crumpled pack. "I don't remember a thing."

"There were fourteen people in that bar who will do plenty remembering."

He shrugged that off.

I knew what he was thinking. His money could buy their memories, if it was necessary. He didn't have to worry.

He dragged the cigarette to life. "Who am I supposed to have killed?"

"One of your miners. Bill Waker."

The name didn't mean a thing to him.

He heard the shouting outside and went to the barred window. "What the devil do they want?"

"You."

He watched them for awhile and maybe he was worried.

"Just what made you go into

that particular barroom anyway?"

I asked. "Slumming?"

"It's a free country."

"Sure. But you were drunk and wearing a tuxedo and that was a red flag to everybody in there. It sort of reminded them that there are kings and there are peasants. And it especially bothered Bill Waker. One word led to another and you didn't have sense enough to leave. Or the gun you carried made you brave."

He scowled. "It was self-defense. He started the fight. Everybody who was there knows that."

"Maybe. But half the people around here are Wakers or related to them. They won't want to look at it that way." I smiled faintly. "And I'm glad to see your memory isn't as bad as you thought it was."

I went back into the office.

Jed was at the window. "They got themselves a few more jugs."

I took a look. There were close to fifty of them now and maybe they were trying to work up their courage, but I still thought they'd get just plain drunk first and look for a place to sleep. I recognized a couple of Jed's cousins sitting in a Model A.

The powerful beams of car headlights brightened the street and a horn blew. The mob blinked and gave ground grudgingly to let the convertible through.

It stopped in front of the jail. The crowd closed in slightly—curious, awed, and maybe resentful of the car and the woman who drove it.

Helen Randall got out and came up the steps. I unlocked the door.

Helen had clear blue eyes and she looked at me. "Lew, where is my brother?"

"We've got only two cells," Jed said. "I'm sure he's in one of them."

I took her to the small cell block and Jed followed.

Randall came to the bars. "Well, well, my dear little sister. It's so nice of you to drop everything and rush right over."

She flushed faintly. "I came as soon as I learned you were in trouble. I was at the Jacksons. You know that's over sixty miles from here."

He showed white teeth. "As long as you're finally here, dear Helen. We Randalls must rally around the flag, even if there are just two of us."

"Just what happened, Philip? Carson didn't explain too clearly."

Randall rubbed the back of his neck. "They tell me I killed somebody. Walker—Welker—Wilker. Something like that."

"Bill Waker," Jed said evenly. "He left a wife and six kids."

"Is that right?" Randall said dis-

interestedly. "These hill people have such large families."

Jed turned on his heel and left.

Helen touched my arm. "I'd like to talk to Philip alone, please."

In the office I found Jed working angrily on another clean rifle.

Helen joined us after ten minutes. "Can't you do anything about those people out there, Lew? They're making Philip—well—nervous."

"He's perfectly safe here, Helen."

She didn't seem too sure of that. "Don't you think that it might be better if you took Philip to Marysville?"

I shook my head. "No, Helen. I don't think we ought to move him out of the county."

She had to accept that. "You won't let anything happen to him?" she asked.

"Of course not."

She went to the door. "I'll see if I can get in touch with Carson and find out what he's been doing for Philip."

"Just a minute," I said. I took a rifle from the rack and unlocked the door. The crowd watched me and the noise died.

"Move away from the lady's car," I ordered.

Helen frowned slightly. "You didn't have to do that, Lew. I'm sure they wouldn't have done anything."

I pointed the rifle at Elmo Walk-

er's chest. He was the dead Bill Waker's uncle. "You heard me, Elmo. Are you going to move or would you rather have other people carry you away?"

He glared at me and backed away from the car. The rest of them sullenly followed his example.

I watched Helen drive away and then raised my voice. "All of you get back to your homes and sober up. Or if you aren't ready for that, at least get off the streets."

There were hoots as I stepped back inside the building.

Jed had his chair tipped against a wall and stared thoughtfully at his fingernails. "Do you think the State will get around to hanging Randall?"

I said nothing.

Jed looked up. "We got the names of fourteen witnesses. They got good eyesight."

"And poor pockets."

Jed became thoughtful. And I imagined his thoughts were on what would probably happen. Randall would put a little money into circulation and just about everybody would either forget what happened or claim that he saw something else when it came time to tell about it in court.

He glowered. "Some of the witnesses were Waker kin. They can't be bought."

"I wouldn't bet on that. There's nothing thinner than blood when money is around."

He rubbed the knuckles of one hand. "It isn't right. Who does he think we are anyway?"

"I wouldn't know."

A pane of glass in the front window suddenly shattered and a stone skidded across the floor.

Jed swore and got quickly to his feet.

I went to the window. The mob had swelled and now there was even a scattering of eager-eyed women. But that stone was the only one that came our way. For now, at least.

I went back to my desk and glanced at the list of witnesses who had been in the bar. Eleven men and three women. One of them was Donna Mae Davis.

"Donna Mae," I said thoughtfully.

Jed stiffened. "What about her?"

"Who was she with?"

Jed didn't say anything.

Donna Mae was about nineteen and I'd seen her with Jed a number of times. But not lately.

"Did Randall bring her? Or was she there waiting for him?"

"I didn't ask," Jed snapped.

I put down the list and yawned. "Well, maybe he was going to marry her."

But that was something nobody

in town believed—unless it was Donna Mae.

Randall called and we went to his cell.

His face was pale. "They're getting worse out there. Can't you hear them? They're out for blood." His hands gripped the bars. "Look, Bragan. Take me to Marysville. I'll make it worth your while. A thousand bucks."

"I'll think it over," I said.

Back in the office, Jed was thinking and I knew it was about a thousand dollars.

I went to the wall cabinet and opened it.

Jed frowned. "What are you doing?"

I hefted one of the tear gas grenades. "I'm going to make a little open space out there. It's getting too crowded."

Jed's mouth dropped. "You can't do that!"

"Why not?"

"Women are out there, too."

"They've got no business here. This isn't a family picnic. Or do they want to help pull the rope?"

I went to the door and flung it open. I pulled the pin and tossed the grenade into the center of the crowd. I stepped back inside and locked the door.

It took a couple of seconds before they felt what I'd done and then there were curses and shouts

and the frightened angry screaming of the women.

Jed glared. "You could at least have given them a warning."

"They understand this a lot better."

"They'll be back. This time without the women."

"I've got more grenades."

Jed was silent for a while and then he said, "Suppose we take Randall to Marysville. How would we split the thousand he promised?"

"We don't take his money. We get our salaries."

He laughed harshly. "You'll take the money. You're not that straight. Your palm's just as sticky as anybody's."

I let the big wall clock tick for fifteen seconds and then I smiled slowly. "You're fired."

He stared at me.

"You're fired," I said again.

Color rushed into his face. "What the hell! You wouldn't fire me at a time like this. Not because of what I just said. You're going to take Randall to Marysville all by yourself and pocket the money."

"Leave the badge here," I said evenly.

He moved toward me, his big hands working.

I slipped the .38 from my holster. "If you're not listening, maybe you can understand this."

His eyes blazed, but he stopped. He slowly unpinning the badge from his shirt and flipped it into the wastebasket.

When he was gone, I re-locked the door.

Randall called again after half an hour.

His face was puzzled. "Everybody's gone. The streets are deserted."

"It's late. They got drunk and sleepy."

Randall was still uneasy. "I don't know. I think you ought to take me to Marysville. I'll make it two thousand."

"You're safe here."

I went back to the office. I leaned back in my chair and put my legs on the desk. I yawned.

The click of the lock woke me.

There must have been about a dozen of them and they poured through the door like a river. My hand went toward my holster, but a half dozen shotguns pointed at my chest told me to stop that.

They were all masked—some with black dominoes, some with handkerchiefs pulled to their eyes, and two had nylon stockings over their heads.

I raised my hands. "You're making the mistake of your lives. You'll regret this as long as you live."

None of them said a word, but

their leader, a big man with a .45 caliber army automatic, took the ring of keys from the peg and indicated in the direction of the cells.

I moved ahead of him. "Don't be fools," I said. Half of the State will be down on your necks."

Randall's face turned sheet-white when he saw us. "Bragan!" he shrieked. "You can't let them do this!"

There were a dozen keys on the ring, but the big man found the right one without taking an inventory. He opened Randall's cell and four or five of them went inside for him. And they needed that many. Randall screamed and kicked and bit while they dragged him out.

The big man shoved me into the empty cell and slammed the door.

I watched him lock up. His hands were gloved and so he wasn't going to leave any fingerprints. I noticed that there were two slight cut marks in the leather of his right shoe.

One of the men remained behind for a moment. He was thin and I thought I could see a grim smile behind the nylon stocking. He pulled the pin out of a tear gas grenade and lay it on the floor outside of my cell where it would be just inches out of my reach.

"Eat that, Bragan," he snapped, and ran out of the front door.

I whipped off my belt, made a loop at the last hole, and flipped it over the grenade and pulled it toward me. I picked it up, darted to the window, and gave it a flip as far outside and downwind as I could. Not much of the tear gas was in the cell, but there was enough to keep me at the window.

I could still hear Randall screaming hysterically, but from the window. I couldn't see the masked men or what they were doing.

I shouted and that brought me nobody. But I was certain that a lot of people were watching from the corner of their shades.

And then Randall stopped screaming.

There was silence for ten minutes and then I heard the sounds of cars starting and driving away.

The silence returned.

I shouted again and again and got nothing but the echo of my voice.

After awhile I gave it up and there was nothing to do but wait.

The air in my cell had cleared and I smoked a half a dozen cigarettes before I heard the footsteps in the office.

It was Jed Tracy. He almost smiled. "I thought you could handle everything?"

I rose from the bunk. "Get the key."

He took his time about it.

I stepped out of the cell. "Where were you?"

"I was fired and home sleeping."

I looked down at the two cut marks on the toe of his right shoe. "You're sure about that?"

He grinned faintly. "I'm sure and so are all my kin."

"They watched you sleep?"

"Why not?"

"What woke you?"

"Ted Purley phoned my place and told me what happened. So I thought I'd wander back here to see if there was anything I could do—as a private citizen." His next words were cautious. "Did you recognize any of them?"

"Would it do any good?"

He rubbed his chin as though he were considering it objectively. "Might not. People have a way of sticking together around here. It would be hard to pin the lynching on anybody."

They had left my gun on the desk and I put it back in my holster. "I had the door locked, but they got in. Now I wonder how they got a key."

Jed's eyes flickered. "It's an old lock. Half the keys in town could open that door."

"Where's Randall?"

"Not far. Just down the street a way."

I went to the door and stepped out on the landing.

Randall was hanging from the oak in front of the general store.

I went back inside and phoned the State troopers. Then I picked my hat off the floor. "Let's get a ladder and cut him down."

The first troopers arrived in twenty minutes, and more came later. A lot more.

There were questions for me to answer, but what I had to say didn't help anybody much. I didn't mention the scratches on Jed's shoes. They weren't enough to get him into any court and I still wanted to live in this town awhile.

The sun was newly up when I drove to the big house on the hill to tell Helen Randall what had happened, but she already knew.

The mist of tears was in her eyes and she came into my arms—because now she was alone, because now she knew me better than anyone now alive, because we had been very close in college.

I patted her shoulder. "I'm sorry, Helen."

"Don't blame yourself, Lew. I know you did everything you could."

Yes. I had done everything I could.

I had done everything I could to see that Randall died.

The mob had been there, but I was certain it hadn't been ready to do anything more than use its lungs and throw a few stones. I had to work it up. I had to make it white angry. And the tear gas had helped.

But still I wasn't sure that it would move unless it had somebody to lead it—somebody who was eaten by the bitterness of bought justice, somebody who brooded about Donna Mae, somebody who thought I wasn't going to share a thousand dollars for taking Randall to Marysville.

I had worked on these things and I had worked on Jed, and when he was ready, I had given the mob its leader.

Now I looked past Helen at the hills. They and the coal in them had been Philip Randall's, and now they belonged to Helen.

She held me tight and I smiled.

It wouldn't be long before they belonged to me.






Special Award Winner

A VERY CAUTIOUS BOY

by Gilbert Ralston

Professional killers have every reason to be cautious. Their insurance rate is practically prohibitive as it is, and they certainly cannot afford, by being careless and getting killed, to have their insurance rate go up even more.



ROSSETTI'S RESTAURANT is tucked away in a remodeled brownstone on New York's 46th Street, close enough to Park Avenue to be considered a good address. Once, in the days of the Charleston and the blind pig, it was one of the town's plushier speakeasies. Now it has become one of the string of expensive character restaurants which dot the East Side.

Lee Costa took a moment to remember it as it was in the old days when Fat Joe Waxman owned it, keeping a fatherly eye out for the welfare of the young tenement boys who ran his less dubious errands, with particular solicitude for the developing skills of the brightest of these, one of whom was Costa.

His faith was not misplaced. Lee Costa had turned out well. Fat Joe would have been proud of him on this August night as he stood, a compact, ruggedly powerful man, amusing himself with nostalgic thoughts, quietly watching a group of opulent-looking customers enter the refurbished establishment.

Costa took another moment to look it over after he made his way past the door. The layout of the place was as he remembered it: a long bar running the length of one wall opposite a row of booths, a dining area, a check room at his right.

He stood for a moment in the entranceway near the reservation desk, pausing while a headwaiter made his way out of the gloom.

"I'm looking for Joe Rosetti," Costa said.

"Who shall I say is calling?"

"Tell him the insurance man is here."

"No name?"

"Just tell him. He'll know."

"You may wait in the bar, if you wish."

Costa crossed to the check room to leave his coat. As he turned to go toward the bar, he found his way blocked by the hulking form of one of the waiters. "C'mon," he said. "I'll take you up." He jerked a thumb at an ancient elevator in the corner of the room.

The Rosetti apartment was the only one on the fourth floor, the

lock on the door opening with a muted buzz after the guide had pressed the doorbell. They entered a living room which spread across a large part of the side of the building, furnished simply and well, a group of heavy antiques giving it a comfortable feeling of old-fashioned luxury.

A rotund little man stood in the doorway of the room, examining Costa with a quizzical eye. "I'm Joe Rosetti," he said, his accent betraying his Italian parentage. He made no move to take Costa's hand, simply stood and looked at him, his head cocked a little to one side, a tiny frown of concentration on his forehead.

"You're smaller than I thought you'd be," he said. "Come in. Sit. You too, Ziggy." He held the door of the interior room open as Costa and his guide passed through. "Meet Lee Costa, Mama," he said. Across the room a tiny, dark woman raised her head, holding Costa's eyes with her own, searching his face. She sighed, the sound making a little explosive punctuation in the still room. "This is him?" she said.

Rosetti nodded his head.

She stared at Costa as she gathered up her knitting. "Take care of your business, Papa. After, we will eat." She left the room.

Ziggy stood up, looking down

at Costa. "This guy bringing you some trouble?" he asked Rosetti.

Rosetti shook his head.

Costa's cold blue eyes were suddenly alert. "If I was bringing trouble, what would you do?"

"Throw you away somewhere," the big man said, taking a step toward him.

Costa turned to Rosetti. "Better chain up your ape." He turned a bland face to the standing man. "Back off, fat boy," he said calmly.

The man started for him, hands reaching for his lapels. As he bent over, Costa's foot shot out, catching him squarely in the midriff. He doubled over with an agonized gasp. Costa went to him, flipping him to the floor with a crash. "Sorry, Mr. Rosetti," Costa said. "He asked for it."

Rosetti leaned across his desk to look at the prone man writhing on the floor. "So fast," he said. "Like a snake."

"You're good at your job, Mr. Rosetti. I'm good at mine."

"He'll kill you," Rosetti said.

Costa shook his head. "No he won't, Mr. Rosetti. He'll go downstairs and take care of the drunks. Won't you, Ziggy?"

On the floor, the man gasped for breath, turning his head like a wounded turtle. His eyes went to Costa's smiling face.

"Next time," Costa said, "I

won't treat you so gently. Remember that."

With an inarticulate grunt, the man staggered to his feet and out of the room.

"Why was Ziggy here, Mr. Rosetti?" Costa asked.

"I was afraid."

"Of me? You don't have to be. I'm a professional. I do what I'm paid for, nothing more."

Rosetti settled back in his chair, nervously.

"Go ahead, tell me about it," Costa said. "Our mutual friend said you had a problem."

"I have a problem. That's why I sent for you."

"Tell me the name of the problem, Mr. Rosetti."

"His name is Baxter. Roy Baxter."

"No other way to handle it?"

"I could pay."

"That doesn't usually work with a blackmailer," Costa said.

"You know about it?"

"Only what our friend told me. He said that someone was trying to shake you down."

Rosetti hesitated.

"Go ahead, Mr. Rosetti. You can trust me."

Rosetti looked away, his face working. "It was a long time ago. I killed a man. Baxter found out about it. He wants money. I know him. He won't stop. He'll never

stop, if I pay. So I called our friend. I did him a favor once. A big one. Now he pays back. With you."

"Have you told your wife?"

"She knows. But she don't talk."

"Anybody else know about me?"

"No. Just me, Mama and our friend." Rosetti reached into the drawer of his desk. "Here's the addresses for Baxter. His house. His business. A picture."

Costa glanced at the addresses. "What's his business?"

"He's a lawyer. Or says he is. I don't know how he makes his money. He's supposed to have some."

"Why does he want yours, then?"

"I don't know. Maybe he's got expenses."

"Expenses. I have them, too," Costa said.

"I know. I can pay."

"Our friend said to give you the wholesale rate." Costa smiled at him again. "Could you afford five thousand?"

"Yes. What Baxter wants makes that sound like a bargain."

"How much time did he give you?"

"He said he would give me two weeks to raise twenty-five thousand dollars. Then he goes to the police."

Costa stood, carefully tucking the papers into his pocket. "I'll look the situation over. Let you know."

Rosetti looked at him, his hands working. "Please," he said.

"I'm a very cautious boy, Mr. Rosetti. I'll check it out. Let you know." Costa let his eyes wander to the mounted tarpon over the mantel. "You're jumpy," he said. "Why don't you go fishing for a few days?"

Rosetti made a little wry grimace. "Me?" he said. "Every week end I fish. All summer. Mama and I. Every week end. We have a little boat. We live quiet. Run the restaurant. Fish. All of a sudden, I get a call from that Baxter. I don't fish. I don't run the restaurant. Just worry."

"I'll do what I can, Mr. Rosetti. Maybe you'll be fishing again soon."

Costa left the room, nodding pleasantly to Mama Rosetti as he passed her in the living room. She looked up, her sad little face following him as he started for the door. "You have your dinner?" she asked.

"Not yet."

"Come downstairs. We'll eat." She crossed to the other door. "Coming, Papa?"

He appeared in the doorway. "Go eat," he said. "While I sleep."

"Cover up good, Papa," she said.

They sat in one of the booths in the restaurant, the little woman saying only a few words while they ate. Finally, after the coffee was served, she looked up at him.

"It is a sad thing," she said. "Papa is so afraid."

"Are you?" Costa asked.

"Me? No, I am not afraid. What must be done, must be done. There is no other way. Always must a person fight. All his life. I know this."

"Don't worry about it. I will be very careful."

"Careful. Yes. I too am careful. You must be very sure."

"Don't worry, Mama Rosetti."

He rose to leave.

"You have a coat?"

"Yes. In the check room."

"Wrap up good," she said. "Don't catch cold."

Her black eyes followed him as he left the restaurant.

He made a routine check of the job the next morning. Baxter's office was on the West Side in a building on 56th Street. Costa arrived there a little before nine o'clock, losing himself in the crowd of incoming office employees, waiting at the end of the hall

on the eleventh floor where he could see the entrance to Baxter's office. He was not pleased with the area. It was awkwardly arranged for a killing, with its manned elevators, people coming and going and too many late-hour businesses.

Baxter entered his office at ninety-three, a dapper, squat individual, with the stub of a cigar clamped in his jaws. Costa waited another fifteen minutes in the hall, then entered the office, handing Baxter's secretary a card showing him to be the salesman for an office-supply company. He politely accepted the secretary's statement that Mr. Baxter was happy with his present supplier, and left, after a photographic glance at the interior of the office. He shook his head in dissatisfaction as he rode down in the elevator.

That afternoon he drove to Connecticut in a rented car, stopping at a real-estate agent's office close to the second address that Rosetti had given him for Baxter. The agent obligingly drove him through the area, rattling off the virtues of life in Connecticut as she did so. His examination of the Baxter house was made easier by the presence of a vacant house a few doors away, in which he indicated great interest. At his request, the agent drove him down the street while he examined the

homes of his potential neighbors. Baxter's house was the last one in a group of six, an ostentatious modern facing the Sound, enclosed by a high brick wall. Costa stopped for a moment to study it. The entrance was barred by an ornamental iron gate, a large "Beware of the Dog" sign across the corner of it. In the yard beyond the gate, a large boxer set up a frantic clamor at their approach.

Costa spent the rest of the afternoon as a prospective customer, thoroughly convincing the receptive agent that he was a transplanted executive named Zweller from a small business in Ohio, that his wife would arrive shortly, and that he would be back with her to buy a house. In the process, he was given a gratuitous run-down on the goings and comings of the local homeowners, including Baxter, who was known as a widower of quiet habits, currently living alone, cared for by a Swedish couple who slept in town.

At six o'clock he was back at the Rosettis', seated in their living room. Rosetti was planted in the chair behind his desk, Mama Rosetti across the room at her endless knitting.

"I have Mama here. Like you said on the phone."

Costa looked at the woman, then back to Rosetti. "I wanted to

talk to you together," he said. "The job is possible. Only one thing about it I don't like."

"What don't you like?"

"I need a little insurance," Costa said.

Rosetti leaned toward him. "You mean you won't do it?"

"I mean I won't do it without help. I'll need you both."

Mama Rosetti folded her hands into her lap. "Make me understand," she said.

"I don't like his office for the job. Too busy. It'll have to be the house. I won't drive to it."

He paused.

"So?" Rosetti said.

"So we go fishing this week end. All three of us. I'll tell you where to anchor. I'll take care of the assignment while we're there. That will make you both accessories before and after the fact. Makes for a nice silent relationship in the future."

Rosetti turned to the woman. "Mama?" he said.

She looked at Costa for a long moment. Then she sighed, nodding her head slowly.

"I think it is all right, Papa," she said. "It is a thing we have to do. I do not blame him for his caution."

Rosetti turned to Costa. "We will do it," he said. "We have no choice."

"We have a deal," Lee Costa said.

"What must we do?" Rosetti asked.

"Pick me up Saturday morning at the gas dock at City Island. Gas the boat. I'll come aboard while the attendant's busy." Costa rose to leave. "After that, I'll tell you where to go. Leave the rest to me."

"Wrap up good," Mama Rosetti said. "Don't catch cold."

Lost in a crowd of yachtsmen and guests, Costa was an unobtrusive figure as he waited on the public dock the following Saturday. He watched quietly while the Rosettis arrived on a small cruiser, edging it to the dock. Then he worked his way through a crowd of noisy fishermen and stepped aboard, moving into the cabin while Rosetti kept the harassed attendant busy. Minutes later, they were moving toward the Connecticut shore, Rosetti at the wheel, Costa beside him, Mama Rosetti at her endless knitting in a wicker chair.

Early in the afternoon, they anchored the boat in the sheltered area around the point of the peninsula on which the Baxter house rested.

"What now?" Rosetti asked nervously.

"Eat. Fish. Be a playboy," Costa said.

"You hungry?" Mama Rosetti asked.

"A little."

"All right, I make dinner. Now, you fish with Papa."

At six o'clock she called to them from the cabin door. "Come downstairs," she called. "We'll eat."

"Below, Mama," Rosetti said. "Not downstairs."

"Downstairs," she said. "You're the sailor. I'm the cook."

It was a tense meal, Rosetti stopping to look nervously at Costa, Mama Rosetti silent and occupied with serving them from the galley stove.

Costa rested on one of the bunks for half an hour afterwards, arising to find the questioning eyes of the Rosettis on him again. "I'm going for a little swim," he said.

Mama Rosetti reached out a small brown hand, patted his arm. "Be careful," she said.

He smiled down at her. "I'm always careful," he said. "I'm a very cautious boy."

He disappeared into the cabin, appearing a few minutes later in swimming trunks and the top half of a skindiver's wet suit. He stood for a moment near the stern, placed a black rubber hood on his head, flippers on his feet, worked

mask and snorkel into place and dropped softly into the water. He checked the collar of his wet suit to be sure that the small plastic bag he had tucked there was still in place, felt for the rubber gloves attached to his belt and swam slowly toward the shore, slipping smoothly through the black water, the rubber suit and flippers giving him enough buoyancy to conserve his strength.

A half-hour later, he stopped a few feet away from the end of the Baxter dock, then drifted in until he could rest his weight on the bottom. He reached again under the collar of his suit, pulled out the bag, opened it, carefully keeping the piece of meat it contained out of the water. He gave a low whistle, waiting while the dog's feet made a rhythmic thumping on the dock. He threw the meat almost at the feet of the dog, whose barking echoed along the quiet beach. Then he slipped back to deep water again, floating, head low in the water, breathing through his snorkel, head down, virtually invisible from the shore. The barking grew louder.

A moment later, the robed figure of Baxter came out onto the upstairs porch, flashlight in hand. After a careful examination of the yard, he called down to silence the dog. Costa waited.

After Baxter returned to his room, the dog nosed around the end of the dock restlessly, then turned to give his attention to the meat. Costa could see the outline of the animal as he nuzzled it, hear the ugly little sounds as he gulped it down. He waited while an agonized whine came from the dog, his frantic feet drumming on the dock. When the sound stopped, Costa floated in again, gave another low whistle. There was no reaction from the dog. Costa stuck his head up cautiously. The animal was lying near the edge of the dock. Costa pulled off the mask and flippers, then pulled the body of the dog into the shadow cast by the boathouse. A tiny portion of the meat was still on the wooden floor of the dock. Carefully, he picked it up and threw it into the sea, returning to the shadowed area to wait patiently for a long half-hour, pleased when the servants appeared at the back door on schedule to climb into a station wagon. They drove away, the gate closing automatically after them.

Costa let the sound of the disappearing car die out before he got out of his swimming gear and moved to the balustrade of the porch. Slowly, he snaked up it, slipping over the edge of the upstairs rail soundlessly, lying on the

floor of the porch a good ten minutes before he moved again. On his belly, he slipped the gloves on his hands, after which he wormed his way to the edge of the French windows. They were open. Two minutes later, he was standing over the sleeping form of Roy Baxter. Costa braced his feet. His hands fastened to the throat of the sleeping man. Costa held on for a long time, then stripped a glove from his right hand to check the pulse of the body in the bed. Satisfied that Baxter was dead, he placed the glove on his hand again and left the way he had come.

At the dock, he replaced his swimming gear, pulled the dog's body to the edge of the dock and dropped with it into the water. He stopped to estimate the direction of the Rosetti boat before he towed the dog's body well out into the Sound, releasing it where the outgoing tide would carry it away. He worked his way slowly and easily back to the boat, letting the tide aid him in the long swim. As he approached it, he could see the Rosettis sitting in the stern cockpit.

"Costa?" Rosetti called.

"Coming in," Costa said. He handed them the flippers and the mask, climbing over the edge of the cockpit almost at the feet of the Rosettis. "It's done," he said.

Mama Rosetti looked at him, her black eyes inscrutable in the soft light.

"No trouble?"

"No trouble."

"Take off those wet clothes. You freeze to death."

Costa went into the cabin, peeled out of the rubber jacket, dried his head, put on slacks and a sweater and returned to the Rosettis.

Mama Rosetti was back in her wicker chair, her hands busy again with the knitting. From somewhere Papa Rosetti had pulled out a bottle of wine.

"Here," he said to Costa, "Drink." He poured three glasses.

They drank. For a long time Mama Rosetti studied Costa's face. "Everything all right, huh?" she said.

"Worked fine," Lee Costa said. "Nobody saw me. Nobody knows I'm here. Nobody knows what happened. Except you and me."

"You shoot him?" Rosetti asked.

"I don't use guns," Costa said. "These are good enough." He held up a hard hand, pointed to the rim

of calluses on the edge of his palm.

Rosetti stood by the cabin door. "I'm tired, Mama."

She looked over at him, her face warm with concern. "Cover up good, Papa. Sleep well." She turned to Costa. "You too, Mr. Costa. You need to go to bed."

Costa rose, standing on the deck of the boat to stretch. "Nice night, isn't it?" he said, smiling down at her.


"Yes," she said, pulling an ugly little automatic out from under her knitting. "A very nice night." She shot him, twice, over the heart. Costa's body was thrown backwards, hitting the water with a soft splash. Mama Rosetti leaned over the rail of the boat, pistol in hand, while she watched the body sink, as it slowly moved away with the tide.

"What now, Mama?" Rosetti's head was sticking out of the cabin door.

She turned to him gravely. "Nothing more. It is finished." She threw the pistol over the side. "Cover up good, Papa. Don't catch cold."



Scientific tests have shown that given ample opportunity and sufficient motive, just about any child will cheat during an examination. This has become known—in our time—as the Law of Getting Good Marks. Adults, however, behave on a grander scale, making use of the higher-echelon crimes—like murder, arson and the like.



LOCATE the cervical vertebrae, the presternum, the lumbar, and the coccygeal. *All right*, Perry Hatch said to himself, hunched over the examination form, and reached down to scratch his ankle. He pulled out the strip of paper concealed in his sock, and glanced up to see what Professor Jarvis was doing. As usual, the Professor was mouth-breathing and looking blank behind his thick eyeglasses.

It was a cinch. He knew the answer to the next question without consulting his hidden notes. The third was more of a problem, and his ankle itched again.

"Mister Hatch!"

The boy's head jerked backwards at the sudden cry. Professor Jarvis was bearing down on him like a shaggy-maned lion, his shapeless coattails flying out behind him. Perry was still clutching the crib sheet when the Professor's fingers closed about his wrist.

"Drop it!" Jarvis thundered. "Drop it this second!"

Perry dropped it; the Professor scooped it up, and saw his suspicions confirmed. Then he wiped

the exam form from the student's desk. "You're excused," he said harshly. "Sit there while the others finish up, and then remain after class."

"Aw, gee, Professor—"

Jarvis whirled and went back to the desk. The gray color was gone from his cheeks. If nothing else, Perry thought wryly, he had breathed some life into the old corpse.

When the hour was up, nobody even glanced at Perry in his disgrace; not even Dino, his buddy. Jarvis, with the arrogance of age, sat shuffling papers when the room was empty. It was ten minutes before he told Perry to come forward.

"Why do you cheat?" he said contemptuously.

"I don't cheat," Perry said. "I mean, not all the time. I was just caught unprepared, that's all."

"You mean you were caught, period." Jarvis blew his nose into a monstrous handkerchief. "I hate cheats and liars, Hatch. There's no place for them at the University."

"Look, you can't—"

"Don't tell me what I can or can't do! How many other exams have you been cribbing?"

"None, Professor, I swear it!"

"I wonder if the Dean will believe that."

"Please, Professor!"

Jarvis shuffled to the blackboard and began wiping off chalk marks with furious concentration. Then he turned.

"I won't report you, Hatch. Not to the Dean. It's too early in the semester to get a student into trouble."

"Gee, that's swell of you—"

"But I don't intend to let your dishonesty go unpunished. So I'm writing to your father tonight."

"To my father? What for?"

"I find that I'm often not as persuasive as a parent," Jarvis said

acidly. "So I intend to enlist some support in your discipline. That will be all, Mr. Hatch."

Jarvis started for the door; Perry's hand clutched at his sleeve. "Professor, wait a minute! You don't understand about my father. I mean, about what he's like—"

"I hope he's very, very strict."

"He'll murder me! He'll cut off my allowance!"

Jarvis pulled his shabby sleeve away, and marched out of the classroom in solemn, immovable righteousness.

Dino was waiting at the General's statue when Perry emerged onto the campus. Dino had a close-cropped head round as a melon, and an expression almost as blank.

MURDER

OUT OF A

HAT

by Henry Slesar



MURDER OUT OF A HAT

31

Perry, a good-looking boy with a sullen mouth, was even more sullen when Dino inquired about the interview.

"The old crumb," Perry muttered. "He says he's going to write my old man. Boy, I can see the fireworks now."

"Gee, that's tough, man."

"What's he always pickin' on me for? What makes him so mean?"

Dino chuckled. "You know what they say about him, Perry. About what a terror his wife is. Man, he's the original henpecked husband, you know that."

"Yeah, I'll bet that's it, all right. That old shrew gives him hell every night, and he takes it out on us."

"Remember what happened last year? When she chased him out of the house, and he had to bunk at the Reo Hotel?" Dino chuckled. "Man, that was a ball. Remember how everybody razzed him in class the next day?"

"Well, I hope she makes him suffer tonight—"

"No such luck," Dino said. "She's not home. She went off to visit her sister or somebody a couple of months ago, and she's not back yet."

"That's too bad," Perry grunted. "Now I got *nothing* to look forward to. Except getting my allowance cut off."

"Gee," Dino said, genuinely concerned, "maybe if you went to see the Professor—"

"What good would that do?"

"Well, maybe if you swallowed your pride, apologized—"

"You really think that might work?"

"You'll probably have to crawl a little. But that's better than losing your allowance, right? Go on, see the old boy tonight. I'll come with you, if you want."

"You mean it?"

"Sure," Dino said, clapping his back. "Let's get a hamburger and you can rehearse your speech. Er, by the way, can you pick up the check? I'm tapped out."

At night, the University was the smallest of small towns, the tiny residences at its perimeter darkened early. Professor Jarvis' house was no more than a bungalow, with a small lawn in front and neighbors flanking him on both sides. As Perry and Dino approached, they saw a yellow light illuminating his study. They could discern, through the large front window, the book-crammed room, the desk covered with papers, reference works, and general bric-a-brac. A skeleton was strung in one corner, an anatomical chart hung crookedly in another, a moth-eaten

moose head above the mantelpiece looked down forlornly. They saw it all from the street, but no Professor.

"Well, come on," Dino whispered. "You goin' in or ain't you?"

Perry halted, chewing his lip. "Aw, what's the use? You know the old guy. He'll just bawl me out again."

"You're chicken," Dino said tauntingly. "That's what's the matter with you."

"It's not that. Besides, I don't even see him."

"He's there, all right. Come on, will ya?"

There was a scraping noise near the house; it startled them both, and they moved into the shadows guiltily.

"What was that?"

"How should I know?" Dino complained. "Will you go to the door, for Pete's sake?"

"I think he's coming out—"

"The noise came from the back. Probably a cat."

Perry moved cautiously around to the back of the Professor's home, with Dino grumbling behind him. When he saw the stream of yellow light spill into the back yard, he pulled Dino aside and flattened himself against the siding. There was the shuffle of footsteps, and both recognized the heavy tread of Professor Jarvis on the back

steps. The next sound was a metallic clang, and Perry peeked cautiously around the corner and saw the old man lifting the cover of a trash can. It was a simple, homey action, but the object that was being relegated to the trash pile was unusual: it was a large round cardboard box, still prettily tied with a pink ribbon. Jarvis shoved it into the container, and pressed the lid down. Then he shuffled back to the house, and closed the door.

"Did you see that?" Perry whispered.

"See what? He was just throwing out some junk."

"In a box? With a ribbon on it?"

"Okay, so he's neat."

Perry snorted, and pulled Dino's arm. "Come on," he said. "Let's take a peek at it."

"Aw, look, Perry—"

"Come on!"

They tiptoed to the back of the house. Perry, delicate-fingered, lifted the trashcan lid, and Dino pulled the round box from the top of the pile. Then Perry replaced the cover noiselessly, and they headed down the street again.

They didn't examine the contents until they were a good six blocks from the residential area. They ducked into a dorm hallway, and Perry placed the box on top of a radiator. But before he attacked

the pink ribbon, he paused and looked at Dino with a numb expression.

"Wait a minute," he whispered. "I just thought of something."

"What?"

"You say the Professor's wife's been gone a long time?"

"Yeah. Why?"

Perry wiped his hands on his trousers, staring at the box. "Dino, maybe you'll think I'm nuts—"

"I do already."

"I'm serious. You know how his wife treated him. What if—I mean, isn't it possible that the old guy finally got up nerve to—*do* something about her?"

"Like what? Hey! what's eating you, Perry?" Then he followed Perry's eyes to the box. "Oh, my God," he said. "For Pete's sake, Perry, you don't mean that—"

"It happens, doesn't it? I mean, guys are always knocking off their wives. He *said* she was visiting her sister, but that doesn't make it true."

"You don't think that box has—"

"We better open it," Perry said grimly.

"Not me! Oh, no, not me!" Dino said. "You tried to scare me, buddy, you succeeded. You want to open that—that thing—you go right ahead. But I'm not touching it!"

Perry laughed. "Don't be a jerk.

It's probably just some old orange peels."

"Well, you open it then. Go on."

Perry put his hand on the bow, but hesitated.

"Go ahead!" Dino said. "You started this, pal. You finish it."

Perry slid the ribbon off the box. Then, cautiously, with Dino moving back two steps in preparation for grisly surprises, he lifted the lid.

It was a hat box, for reposing in it, still nestled in tissue, looking fresh from the milliner's, was a perky little straw hat, gaily decorated across its front with a spray of artificial flowers.

"It's a hat," Perry said blankly. "Just a hat."

"For the love of Pete," Dino breathed.

"Only what's he throwing it out for? I mean, it looks new."

"Maybe he doesn't like it."

"Yeah, but I'll bet his wife does. Yet he throws out a brand-new hat, just like that."

"Well, his wife can't complain. She ain't here."

"That's just the point," Perry said. "She's not here. So he can do anything he wants." He grabbed his friend by the bulky collar of his sweater. "Don't you see it, Dino? He threw it out because he didn't want it anymore—because *she* won't be needing it?"

"You're crazy, Perry!

"It's the truth! Can't you see it? He *did* get rid of her. Now he's getting rid of her things. Little by little. Piece by piece—"

"He wouldn't have the guts—"

"How do you know? He's been pushed, buddy, he's been pushed hard! And he pushed back! The hat proves it!"

"But what about her body? Where's her body?"

"Who knows? Maybe he buried it. Maybe he burned it. Maybe he even—" His eyes glowed with excitement. "Listen, if anybody would know how to dispose of a body, it would be Jarvis. I mean, it's his business, it's his life, this biology stuff. He probably dissolved her in quicklime—"

"Cut it out!" Dino squirmed. "You're giving me the shivers."

"And that old crock was going to write my father! About *me!*" He laughed wildly. "And all the time, he's a killer, a murderer! And he was going to complain about *me!*" He shoved Dino ahead of him. "Come on, buddy—"

"Where we going?"

"To the cops! That's where!"

Lieutenant Jack Roman sat quietly, solemnly, and attentively, and didn't take the liberty of smiling until the eager, tumbling speech

of the hot-eyed youngster seemed finally over. Then he tapped the hatbox with his fingernail and said:

"And because of *this*, you want me to accuse a man of killing his wife?"

"I *know* it sounds nuts," Perry said. "I know it isn't any kind of *proof*. But if you'd just ask around, I mean about what kind of home life Jarvis and his wife had—you probably wouldn't find it so hard to believe."

Roman filled a pipe slowly. "Tell you the truth, boys, I know that part already. I don't think there's anybody in town who doesn't. But fights and bickering and stuff like that—well, murder isn't the usual outcome."

"Then where did Mrs. Jarvis go, huh?"

Roman shrugged. "We didn't check her movements; no need to. If Jarvis said she went to see her sister, that's probably where she went. And as for the hat—well, maybe she *told* him to throw it out. Maybe she was tired of it."

Perry slumped in the wooden chair, and looked at Dino. Dino hoisted his plump shoulders and spread his palms outward. Roman smiled again, this time sympathetically.

"It's not that I don't appreciate this, boys. But you see how it is.

Of course, if you really want to set your minds at rest, we could always call Mrs. Jarvis at her sister's house . . ."

"You think we could?" Perry said eagerly, hating to see the victory slip away. "Could we call her tonight?"

"Well, it's a little late . . ."

"It's only nine o'clock!"

Roman smiled, and picked up the telephone.

"Phyllis?" he said to the operator. "You know Professor Jarvis' wife, I think her name's Margaret? She's gone over to visit her sister in Peggotville, but I don't know her sister's name . . ." He covered the mouthpiece and winked at the boys. "Phyllis knows everybody and everything . . ." Then he returned to the receiver. "What's that? . . . Yes, I guess that must be it, Beattie. Would you give Mrs. Beattie a ring? Thanks, Phyllis."

He hung up, drummed on the desk until the phone jangled. Then he picked it up.

"Mrs. Beattie? Sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Beattie, but I was just wondering if Mrs. Jarvis was with you at the moment? It's nothing important, but—" He stood up, taking the telephone with him. "What's that, Mrs. Beattie? . . . Well, no, I thought she was there . . . Yes, I guess I must be mistaken . . . No, no message . . ."

He dropped the receiver back, but kept his eyes on it, biting his lower lip.

"What's the matter?" Perry said. "Isn't she there?"

"No," Roman said softly. "She was never there. Her sister hasn't seen her in over a year."

Dino whistled, and Roman picked up the hatbox.

"Maybe it wouldn't hurt," he said casually, "to talk to Professor Jarvis. Just for a few minutes . . ."

"Can we come along?"

"You can wait for me outside," Roman said. "But keep those imaginations under control; we don't know anything for a fact. Understand?"

"Sure," Perry Hatch said, with a small, triumphant grin in Dino's direction.

The lieutenant drove them back to the Professor's house, but when he stepped out of the car, the hatbox in his hand, he commanded Perry and Dino to remain quietly in the back seat.

"You wait here," he said sternly, "and hold down the conversation. If I need you for any reason, I'll call you."

"Yes, sir," Perry said obediently.

The obedience was a ruse; as soon as Roman gained admittance to the house, he stepped out of the

car and beckoned Dino after him. When his friend protested, he whispered. "I'm not waiting in the car. I want to hear what happens."

"You're asking for trouble," Dino said.

"Who's chicken now?" Perry grinned.

He tiptoed towards the front window; there was a thick hedge beneath it, high enough for concealment. Crouching, he moved among the branches, ignoring the prickly twigs. When he finally heard noises in the study, they were too faint for clarity; then the occupants of the room must have moved, because he heard plainly the husky, querulous sound of Professor Jarvis' voice.

"I don't understand this, Lieutenant," he said. "Why this sudden interest in my wife?"

"Just curiosity," Roman said. "You see, it isn't every day that someone throws out a brand-new hat." He laughed lightly. "Nice-looking hat, too. You should see some of the horrors my wife brings home."

There was a pause. Then Jarvis said, "Would you mind telling me how you got this hat, Lieutenant?"

"For the moment, Professor, I'd rather not say."

"I threw this hat out not more than an hour ago. Since when do the police investigate trash cans?"

"Just tell me *why* you were throwing it out. Doesn't your wife care for it anymore? As I said, it looks brand new."

"It *is* new. But I just don't want it around."

"Wouldn't your wife have some objection?"

There was a creak as the Professor sat down in the wooden chair behind his desk.

"I'm beginning to find a strange implication in all this, Lieutenant. Are you trying to—accuse me of something?"

"No, just trying to gather some facts. For instance, I understand your wife went to visit her sister. In Peggotville, I believe. Am I right?"

The pause was longer.

"No," Jarvis said flatly. "As a matter of fact, there's no truth to that story."

"But you *did* tell people that's where she was?"

"Yes, I did. It was simpler than the truth."

"And what is the truth, Professor?"

Jarvis sighed.

"I suppose it's all right to tell you," he said. "I'm sure there's some kind of professional ethics in the police department which will respect my confidence. The truth is, lieutenant, that my wife and I are subject to frequent and often

violent quarrels. We had one about two months ago, and as a result—well, she walked out on me. I don't know where she went, and frankly, I don't care. That's all there is to it."

"And you haven't heard from her in all this time? I see." But there was skepticism in Roman's voice. "And there's nobody you can contact, no relative or friend?"

"Her sister was her only living relative, and they were not on amicable terms. As for friends—" He snorted. "Margaret didn't like people."

"Then you don't have any actual *proof* that your wife walked out on you? No note, no telegram, no letter?"

"Nothing at all." He made a sound of annoyance. "Now really, Lieutenant, I wish you'd get to the point. If you have an accusation to make—"

"I'm not accusing you of anything."

"Not even making little guesses? Tiny speculations?" He laughed. "Oh, you've got a policeman's brain, all right. I can see the little wheels turning in your head. Why, you really think I might have—done away with Margaret."

"I didn't say that," Roman answered gravely.

"But that's what you're thinking, isn't it?" Now he laughed

loudly, in the simulation of huge enjoyment. "Why, this is absolutely delicious! You actually suspect me of murder, don't you? You think I'm some kind of Crippen, or Landru? Perhaps you think I chopped her into hamburger and served her at the school cafeteria."

"I don't think murder's funny," Roman said stiffly.

"Then it *is* homicide you're thinking about?"

"If you want, Professor, I'll be blunt. If there's even the slightest possibility, it's my duty to investigate it. I don't doubt you're telling the truth, but you'll have to admit that you had sufficient motive for such a crime. And your recent actions . . ."

"Yes, I suppose I *have* been acting like a skulking scoundrel, haven't I? Telling lies about my wife's whereabouts, throwing out hats . . ." He chuckled. "But tell me how you think I might have done it, Lieutenant? Just from your professional point of view?"

"Well . . ." Roman cleared his throat. "Just as a thought, Professor, it strikes me that you might be the ideal sort of person to dispose of a body intelligently. I mean, with your knowledge of biology, body chemistry . . ."

"Ah! So you think my special training equips me. Interesting! All right, then. And how, for instance,

might I have done the deed? Buried her, perhaps? I don't own a car, you know, and I couldn't very well carry Margaret on my back. Sneaked out onto the lawn and buried her? Dear, dear, I'm afraid my neighbors would have found the spectacle amusing—"

"There are other ways."

"Perhaps I burned the body? I'm afraid that won't do, Lieutenant. My oil burner wouldn't accommodate the dear woman. Or maybe you think I dissected her, and mailed the remnants all over the country? If you check with the post office, you'll find that I rarely send so much as a postcard. Of course, if you'd like to search the house, you have my permission . . ."

Roman wasn't enjoying himself; the edge of his voice was sharper. "There are other ways, Professor, for instance—"

"Quicklime? My, Lieutenant, I'm afraid you weren't much of a chemistry student. Despite what you may have heard, quicklime won't destroy a body; in fact, it actually preserves it. Oh, there are some powerful acids, of course, but do you realize the difficulty of their use? A truly corrosive acid wouldn't destroy only the body; it would also eat away the container—such as a bathtub, for instance." He chuckled dryly. "No, Lieutenant,

I might achieve partial destruction of a body, but not complete, total disintegration. I'm afraid I'm not that clever."

"Professor, I think you're laughing at me—"

"Do you think so? Yes, I suppose I am." Then his voice softened. "I'm sorry. I didn't intend to make light of it. I suppose it's my own guilt . . ."

"Guilt?"

"Of course," Jarvis said wearily. "Do you think I haven't wished Margaret dead a thousand times? Wished that nagging tongue was stilled forever? But the human animal is a complicated beast, unfortunately. Because in my own tormented fashion, lieutenant, I still love my wife. I love her, isn't that incredible? And if she walked in that door now, I'd beg her to stay with me . . ."

There was a moment of silence. Then Roman said:

"Professor, I want to apologize."

"What?"

"I'm sorry. But when those kids came in with the hatbox—"

"Kids?"

"Students of yours. One of them's named Hatch—he was coming to see you tonight when he saw you throw it away. But I wouldn't take it out on him, if I were you."

Jarvis smiled sadly. "Take it out on him? No, Lieutenant, I should

apologize to Mr. Hatch—to all my students. I know I've been criminal—ly harsh to them lately; you can understand why. But you can tell Mr. Hatch that he has nothing to worry about, not even his—indiscretion in class this afternoon.”

“That’s very fine of you, Professor.” Roman stood up. “If there’s anything I can do, to help find your wife—”

“I’m afraid finding her isn’t the answer. Finding her won’t make her want to return.”

“Well, you can count on my help, if you need it.”

“Thank you,” the old man said gently.

They were going to the door; Perry scrambled out of hiding and made a dive for the automobile at the curb; he was just climbing into the rear seat, when Roman came out of the house and walked briskly towards them.

He opened the car door, and jerked his thumb.

“All right,” he said. “Out.”

“What happened?” Dino said, wide-eyed. “Did you learn anything, Lieutenant?”

“I learned something, all right. I

learned not to listen to a couple of nutty kids.”

“But, Lieutenant—” Perry protested.

“Get out of there before I throw you out,” Roman growled. “And the next time you decide to rob a trashcan, you better not let me know about it!”

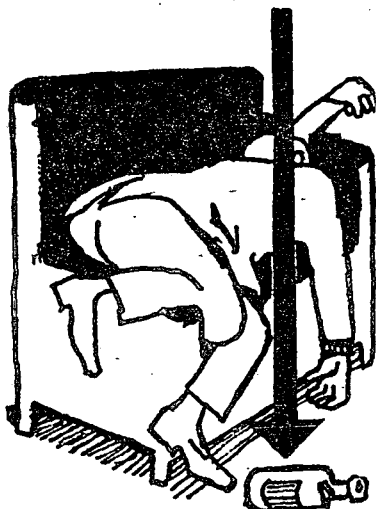
Professor Jarvis remained at his desk for another hour after the lieutenant took his leave. Then he looked at his pocket watch, clucked, and wound it carefully. He stood up, a shaggy, bent figure, and headed for his bedroom.

Then he remembered the hatbox that was still on his desk. He returned, and picked it up. On his way to the trash can, he paused at the end of the room and stopped before the skeleton hanging on silken black threads. It was an admirable skeleton, finely joined, and in superb, almost new condition. He placed the flowered hat on the skull.

“Good night, Margaret,” he said pleasantly, and shuffled out of the room.



When attempting a perfect crime, it is a good idea not to be too fastidious. What if a tantalizing fingerprint or so is left behind? Or a smear of blood? Or a registered murder weapon? If detectives don't have such so-called clues with which to occupy their time, they may get down to business and apprehend you.



DEAD DRUNK

by Bryce Walton

SHE FELT so young in Bert's arms. Almost as young as Bert was, and the sooner her husband was dead, the sooner she could begin feeling young forever. She asked again if he really loved her.

"Please, baby!" Bert said. "Haven't I planned the perfect murder

to prove it? Now haven't I, honey?"

Jane snuggled closer. "We should do it then, not postpone it."

"I guess he's a real gone lush by now."

"Simply sozzled all the time. Very bad now, and that isn't good for our plan."

"No, it isn't. Insurance companies can get touchy about luses. Alkies can become bad risks. Yes, you're right, baby. Let's close the deal out tonight."

She slid her chubby arms around his arched neck.

Jane taxied across town toward the more exclusive East side, feeling lonely and frightened as always when she left Bert. Because she loved him so much, and there would be simply nothing without him. As soon as she left Bert's company he became unreal to her, as if she loved him so much she might have dreamed him up. But then, cool, practical, self-assured Bert was hardly a dream. Bert had plotted the perfect and profitable disposal of Henry, thereby establishing himself as an unmistakable realist of high quality.

After agreeing that Henry was an obstacle to future happiness, Bert had launched on a homicidal campaign from which no unpleasant repercussions could possibly result. Bert first pointed out that most murders are family affairs, that the first suspect is usually (and with considerable statistical justification) the surviving spouse. Given this initial suspicion, a reasonably intelligent cop, backed by modern scientific method, can

usually turn up fatally incriminating evidence.

Consequently, Bert insisted, there must be no evidence of murder, incriminating or otherwise. And of course money was also an important consideration. \$25,000 when Henry passed on. An extra \$25,000 under a "double indemnity" clause.

Unquestionably, Henry's departure must be the result of an accident. But Henry was not accident-prone. Henry was, in fact, positively zealous about avoiding accidents. He never traveled by air, nor over fifty miles an hour in a car. He looked both ways unfailingly before crossing streets, always with the green, never in between. A careful preparation was necessary if Henry's "accident" was to seem a reasonably logical result of character and circumstance.

Then Bert learned from Jane that Henry refused hard liquor in any form, even the smell of a mild social drink. Bert immediately diagnosed Henry as being allergic to the hard stuff and therefore a potential lush. Luses often got falling-down drunk and it would be perfectly understandable if a lush fell victim to a fatal accident. First Henry had to be hooked by a properly disguised dose of the poison. Then, a reasonable length

of time must elapse while Henry's reputation as an alcoholic became firmly established. What did a few months matter, if it led to what often seemed to Jane, through mists of adoration, a prolonged paradise?

A stiff shot of vodka in a big glass of grapefruit juice while Henry was groggy with early morning sleep did the trick. Confident as Jane was of Bert's genius, she was still flabbergasted by the sudden descent of Henry into the bottom of the bottle. She was both delighted and somewhat frightened by the shockingly abrupt transformation in her husband's personality.

Balding little Henry got red in the face. He seemed to swell and smile oddly with devilish humor. He immediately gestured toward the liquor cabinet, hitherto strictly a convenience for guests, and demanded a highball. Jane obliged, a bit flustered by the startling simplicity of success and Henry's violent cooperation.

He drank, and his familiar personality disappeared as if he had discarded an old, drab and ill-fitting suit. The shy, self-effacing, taciturn and walled-off Henry burst forth shouting, cynical, bitterly insulting and arrogant beyond belief. And soon, before Jane's slightly bugged eyes, a com-

plete change occurred, comparable to that from Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde.

"I've been a fool!" Henry shouted, as he stormed and paced and drank straight bourbon like tap water. Then he would rush to the office, demand promotions, raises, while casting sneering reprimands and debasing epithets in all directions, thoroughly ignoring whatever remained of class distinction in industry.

He also seemed not to recognize Jane any longer as his wife. But after a few months of deepening inebriation, he began to admit that somehow or other, in some incredibly stupid moment, he had actually married her. He would sit sopping up his poison and glowering and sneering at Jane. "Yes, you are my wife," he once said. "And I deserve being married to you. I was an idiot in all other ways, and now this. Hell is a restaurant where we serve ourselves."

Henry remained more or less constantly and deeply under the influence after his initiation, while Jane was unable to avoid becoming an authority on the care and treatment of alcoholics. She learned that an accomplished alcoholic never seems drunk because he is always drunk. She learned to dole out varying dosages for desired effects, and to withhold the

addict's liquid fix to make him subservient to her will. For example, it was carefully arranged for Henry to be tanked to just the proper degree for display purposes. There were soon many witnesses willing to testify that Henry often got falling-down drunk, walked through rivers of lethal traffic as if he were strolling leisurely over an empty field. The groundwork for a future diagnosis of "death due to accidental fall," was well established.

Drunken arrogance, boastful verbosity and the like, indicated to his few friends and fellow office workers that he had become a "heavy" drinker. His addiction revealed itself subtly in such things as repetitions of phrases made for stylistic effects, twitches made to appear voluntary, a weakness of the right eyelid which sometimes closed or rather fell, an awkwardness in lighting cigarettes.

Then there were the times when, after being carefully dosed by Jane, he staggered and jiggled in ghastly uncoordination and indulged in monstrous pratfalls that would have shamed professional stuntmen.

It was now six months later and the stage was set, the audience reaction assured, Jane mused happily as the apartment elevator operator treated her to a sympathetic face.

Everyone who knew Jane and Henry Dowd presented Jane with this same sympathetic face, the sort generally extended to the alkyl's martyred wife.

It was only 4 p.m., but Henry, already home, sat hunched on the edge of the couch like a parrot on its perch, his high pale balding head damp as he gazed up from the depths of a voiceless terror. He looked at Jane with a stubborn, anxious expression and began to whine. Things hadn't gone well at the office. He had run out of pocket money. Jane frowned, realizing his potted arrogance had reverted to his basic weaknesses because he had been denied an adequate supply of his unholy brew. Traces of the frightened, helpless wretch shone through the facade erected by alcohol, and the sight filled Jane with loathing.

He needed his little bottle, did he? He had obviously scoured the apartment seeking one. But Jane had hidden them all because his intake had to be planned with meticulous care until late that night.

Henry whispered starkly, "No one understands the need. It's a barbed fish hook. It's like some kind of leech. It won't let go unless you cut off its head!"

Jane glowered in disgust.

"You've drunk everything in the house."

He begged. She agreed to give him a little bourbon, as she checked her watch. The timing had to be exact, of course. If she sent him over to Mike's Bar and Grill too soon, he would pass out long before midnight. Even with her help he would then be unable to stagger out of Mike's, a taxi would have to be called, and that would ruin the plan. But she would manage. She had studied his tolerance levels for months, like an experiment in a chemistry lab. She would nurse him along until she sent him over to Mike's with some pocket money, and he would be in just the proper condition when she went to Mike's at midnight to see that he got safely home—a fixed routine she had established by repetition.

A few carefully spaced shots now did wonders for Henry. His trembling departed. Fear fled from tortured eyes. He regarded her with the contemptuous leer that would grow more pronounced as his saturation increased.

She shook her head. "And on an empty stomach, too," she said. "You don't care about anything else anymore but that terrible stuff. Why, you're like a dope fiend."

"It's better on an empty stomach, you smirking harpy. Clears away

cobwebs faster. Also, you ungainly parasite, there's no comparison with dope. Dope's an escape. This stuff's antidote, see. But you couldn't understand. You've never had the imagination to go beyond your stupid self, feel the incurable terror of never being able to get back." He gave a high giggling laugh. "No escape. Just the antidote. And what's it like? A nightmare and you're falling. That's right, you hideous shrew. Falling, falling down and down. Only you never wake up. It's permanent. You drink and don't mind falling forever."

She gave him another shot.

After that for an even longer stretch of hours than usual, Henry sat with exaggeratedly controlled stiffness and, with high-pitched intensity, elaborately detailed to Jane the inexhaustible and horrible depths of her personality.

At nine that night, Henry's arrogance began to drain away as Jane withheld its liquid support. The fear began dribbling back through the red veins of his eyes, and he begged for money with which he might totter into the night and fetch himself a bottle. Instead, she gave him pocket money and told him to go to Mike's Bar and Grill. She was disgusted with him and could no longer bear his company. His compulsive mono-

logues were nerve-wracking and would interfere with her favorite television shows.

He burped his gratitude and she repeated her warning. "Go straight to Mike's. No other place, understand? If you go someplace else you won't get another cent from me!"

He scurried out, singing his undying thanksgiving.

The scene in Mike's Bar when Jane entered at 12:30, was familiar. It was, in fact, indistinguishable from every other time when she had gone there to rescue Henry, with the ostentatiously selfless devotion that brings sentimental tears to the eyes of the sort of Irish who congregate in Mike's Bar. Henry stood expounding and waving his arms, a shadow standing out a bit from other shadows ringing the piano. She began hurrying Henry out.

The patrons made way for her, embarrassed, sympathetic, as she tugged at Henry's sleeve. In the pale light his graying face had an oddly crafty look, as if he were playing a joke and knew exactly what he was doing. He gestured, grimaced, sounded off in high conclusive phrases for the benefit of this pitifully polluted audience. Jane took added comfort in the

conviction that soon, at rest finally in his grave, he would be better off. Sober he had been a dull, empty bore. This way he was an insulting, arrogant idiot. The one other state—that they had planned for him—would prove a benefit to everyone.

She made her usual gentle plea. "Let's go home now, Henry dear. It's time to go now, Henry."

Henry made a reassuring gesture: "Of course, my chubby little angel of dubious mercy. *Dame sans merci*," he giggled, having freakishly plucked from alcohol-stimulated brain cells, a vague quotation from High School.

He began collapsing as he cast off from the piano like a foundering boat, but Jane supported him, got him through the door with the assistance of the bartender. No, she didn't want a cab. A little walk across the park in cool night air might do poor Henry good.

She guided him with expert, inspired strength along the shadowed sidewalk and into the park, along the curved gravel path on his walk to doom. He slid, wobbled, stumbled, almost fell several times, and as they approached the dark grape arbor, a lithe shadow stirred, and smiled among the frozen serpent stalks of grape vines.

Henry shook free of her clutch,

swayed, made limp waggling motions at the harvest moon. "Falling down—down—down," he chanted. "Cold, deathly cold and, black where we fall down and down forever!"

Then, Bert danced out of the grape arbor with a sizeable rock in his gloved hand and struck without wasting time or motion, two straight methodical drum beats. Neatly and precisely and strictly according to plan, the whack—whack landing just where a falling-down drunk might be expected to bounce his uncaring head on a cold protrusion of equally uncaring stone on an October night.

After making sure that Henry had been battered into the desired state of lifelessness, Bert hoisted the strangely loose body up to the top of a wall, where it flopped as if composed of monstrous pipe-cleaners. Then Bert, quickly, as if suddenly anxious, rolled it over and out of sight, cocking his head to one side and listening to the dry-leaf-rustling descent of the body into the bottom of a gully. Bert tossed the rock after it.

"Run now, baby," Bert crooned. "Do your duty, baby, and I'll see you right after the payoff!"

And Jane, like a pale over-fleshed ghost, ran leaping back across and out of the park and half-fell through the swinging

doors of Mike's Bar and Grill.

"Oh—oh," she sobbed from the depths of what no decent-hearted Irishman would possibly diagnose as anything but a broken heart, "Henry, my Henry—he fell—over the wall—"

Bert's cumulative, festering hatred for Jane had risen considerably above the threshold of endurance. There were various causes for his welling hostility, the main cause being that their crime and its damnable aftermath, had turned her into a hopeless lush.

Jane, hardly a prize to begin with, was now a lush and increasingly repulsive. The more she poured over her double chin, the more grotesquely she tried to assume the role of a femme fatale. Sometimes she thought she was Greta Garbo, nothing more contemporary.

He had just gotten her out of a local bar and back to their apartment, and she was now babbling again for a drink. She blinked bagged eyes and pursed her cupid's bow mouth in a coy leer.

"You're cute, Bert baby," she wheezed. "You're just so huggable, baby boy Bert."

He stared at her incredulously.

He poured her another drink to quiet her down; then he sat bitter-

ly smoking an utterly tasteless cigarette. Well, the best-laid plans of mice, and like that.

It should have gone right, but who can figure everything? Live and learn, learn and die, if you live long enough. The Medical Examiner had said it. Chronic alcoholism, head injury, accidental fall resulting in death. Sounded great, didn't it? But there were immediate complications, stemming from a historical reluctance on the part of insurance companies to pay off unless they find doing so an absolute necessity.

First, the Insurance Company lawyers insisted that chronic alcoholism was a disease, a fact that, with this particular insurance company, could legally void double indemnity provisions. Read the very fine print. Well, that still left \$25,000.

The Insurance Company lawyer went on to insist that Henry had died primarily from chronic alcoholism, not the fall. The disease caused the accident, so it wasn't legally an accident! A medical defense, said Jane's lawyer, could have been that an alcoholic who no longer drinks is in the same category as a TB patient who has undergone treatment, or a diabetic who has done likewise. Only trou-

ble here was that Henry had gone back to the bottle.

In any case, none of that really made much difference after the Insurance Company's legal beagle pulled his *coup de grace*.

Henry had lied when he filled out his application for insurance. Henry had deliberately concealed, by not mentioning it, that he had ever been an alcoholic. Henry had been so proud after coming to a new town, getting a new job, marrying Jane, that he had never taken another drink. And, he was too proud to tell anyone, including Jane and the insurance company, of his former addiction. No one had known. No one could have known, and Henry, proud little man that he was, preferred it that way. But he had lied when he filled out the questionnaire and had not read the fine print involving fraud.

Yes, the Insurance Company contested the claim and won, because they said that Henry had been guilty of fraud in concealing his former years of recurrent alcoholism.

Bert had checked on that. And what he had found was that sometimes lies on an insurance application, can be successfully used to contest subsequent claims.

That's how the cookie crumbles. That's how the mop flops. \$50,000

down the drain because a stupid bald little man was ashamed of his past! It was too much to take, especially when it left him where he was now. Behind the eight ball. Behind the most insufferable eight ball you could cook up even in a joy-popped nightmare. A suet-encased eight ball by the name of Jane.

He stared at her frizzled hair, horrible pink pursed lips.

"It's your fault, baby," he whispered. "You married a freak, a real freak."

"How I know, lover baby? Henery so secrete-tive an' shy all a time. Poor little old Henry bunny boy—"

She giggled and made grotesque coy gestures as he lifted her in his

loving arms and carried her out the door and paused above the rickety stairwell of the gloomy tenement.

"There's always a chance you'll talk too much anyway," Bert said, as he put his hand over her mouth, which caused her eyes to become suddenly sobered and alarmed.

He laughed. "Anyway, baby, isn't it all set up for a neat drunk-en accident?"

He flung her considerable weight outward, and his laugh became a kind of banshee wail of horror as her fear-locked fingers remained clenched in his flesh like the claws of a bear-trap, and her pale hurtling weight dragged him out and down, flapping into darkness like someone who had forgotten to let go of a tossed anchor.



And now that you have finished reading Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, how did you like it? I should find it gratifying to receive your reaction to the stories in it. Write to me at 2441 Beach Court, Palm Beach Shores, Riviera Beach, Florida.

UNSOLVED cases intrigue me, as they do everyone. And of all such cases, disappearances beguile me the most. Naturally, they reach the height of enjoyment when the disappearer—to coin a word—vanishes completely and mysteriously.

That is the way my twin brother, Sylvester, went. The only part of him that presumably remained on this earth were the bloodstains on the blotter of his otherwise immaculate office desk, the stains proving to be of his blood type. There was also his Mercedes, found very early one morning, stopped precisely in the middle of a residential street, motor running and with no one in the car. It was the Marie Celeste, all over again. And, for the first few months, my brother's baffling disappearance seemed well on its way to becoming as celebrated.

Mankind being what it is, everyone enjoyed what had befallen Sylvester Carter, simply because they didn't know exactly what had happened to him. I shouldn't say everyone, because I was an exception. My enjoyment was very special: I not only knew Sylvester's whereabouts, but I was certain I was the only individual who did.

Being an artist, by profession and temperament, I didn't immediately rush off to the police. After all, Sylvester was not only my

brother, but a twin, an identical twin brother at that. And knowing my brother as I did, I knew his disappearance wasn't a simple, wholesome disappearance, for Sylvester was by nature and experience a crook. Syl had been Chairman of the Board of Clay-Wordsworth Corp., doing about nine million dollars worth of business in plastics annually, and, coincidentally, an embezzlement was uncovered at the time of his disappearance.

DOUBLY

by Glenn Andrews

The true artist is interested in money—in its color, texture and in the way a strong north light bounces off of it. But he also enjoys trees and incapacitating storms and that which is unattainable. And so, understandably, our artist hero would also like to experience the tang of crime.



My relationship to my brother's dropping out of sight changed one cold December morning, four years after he'd vanished. My cold water flat happened to be particularly bleak and cold that day. And having company, I found, aggravated

matters rather than helped them.

I'd been drinking in the bar downstairs, the night before. It was right in the building in which I lived, and I must have asked this Joe Martone to pay me a visit because he said I had and he was there.

"Say," Martone said, wandering around my unframed canvases, holding one up on occasion at arm's length and squinting at it. "Say."

That one word criticism was apparently favorable, but I wasn't flattered by it. Maybe my being slightly hung over had something to do with my mood, maybe the sudden barrenness of this place I called home, maybe the gray, frozen winter day.

"Come off it, Martone," I said with utter distaste. "They're all second-rate and you know that they are."

Martone pulled in his lank chin, aghast at my outburst.

"So what if I do capture the essence of reality in all its wondrous, multifarious phases?"

Martone laughed. "That what

MISSING



you been trying to do? Hmm. Glad you told me."

"What all of us fine artists are out to do is make a buck and don't you forget it."

"Why are you picking on me? The only thing I've forgotten is what a buck looks like."

So Martone, in addition to being lank and half-starved looking, was a humorist. Right then, even a really good joke would have rubbed me the wrong way. So I walked around the drab, cold studio declaiming against art and artists and reviling an occupation that did not clothe or shelter you properly, that offered you nothing in return for dedication except the misery of frustration.

Martone let me talk. But instead of proving a catharsis, all my talk only made me feel worse.

"What you want is happiness!" I yelled at him, yelled in spite of my splitting head. "And it's what I want. It's what everyone wants. Right?"

"Right," Martone said, plainly afraid to give me any answer but the one I wanted.

"So why all this dedication? Why all this being miserable?"

Martone shrugged.

"Take Van Gogh, or Gauguin," I persisted. "Toulouse Lautrec. Any of the ones that made it. Is that what you want? The empty,

unheard, final accolade of history?"

Martone started to break in with some argument, but I cut him off. "The ones we despise, are the ones we should admire—and way down deep, we do. Because they're the true hedonists. They're the ones who know how to bring some joy into life. And if that calls for making some money illegally, so what? There are no absolutes in morality, just as there are none where aesthetics is concerned. There's nothing wrong with blackmail—"

Finally, Martone managed to interrupt, and he was shaking his head as he said, "You wouldn't enjoy breaking the law; you've no taste for it. You're not the sort. You'd no more enjoy being a criminal, than you enjoy being an artist."

"So what are you saying?" I demanded of him. "That there's no hope? That I'm doomed to being miserable?"

He was a comedian all right. "Maybe," he said. And then he laughed and added, "You and me both."

It wasn't just chance that had made me mention blackmail, instead of the other crimes, in making my point. But blackmail had occurred to me off and on, ever since good old Syl had done his vanishing act. The world had enjoyed his performance, and Syl I

was certain had profited by it. Now it was time for me—the impractical, impecunious artist—to go into business. And I had something valuable to sell. Silence. A commodity—as everyone knows—that is golden.

Before Martone left that morning, I put the touch on him. And though he and my other impoverished friends had little to contribute towards the execution of my plan, one of them was a good artist and I managed not only to steal a painting from him, the first sizeable dishonest act of my life, but also, which was just as remarkable, to sell it.

By March of the following year, I was on my way to Monteriggioni, one of the hill towns of Italy. The tourist literature had nothing to say about it. They were ecstatic over Glorious Florence and Sublime Rome, but of course they did not know of Monteriggioni, so minute its name appears only on the largest scale maps.

Entering it was like moving forward spatially, but backwards in time—straight into the Middle Ages. I stood on the sunbleached, unpaved street, and I felt wonderful. Though there was a fiery intensity about this Italian sunshine, after the bitter cold winter I had spent, it was soothing, really sensuously delicious. I had certain

qualms about the imminent meeting with my brother, but I rationalized and minimized them. A gun, that sort of weapon, would not be necessary. What I possessed would be just as effective. At any rate, I tried to persuade myself that this was the case.

As I walked up the town's narrow street, the sun glared off its whiteness and off the low, archaic buildings. There was a beauty about the town's utter remoteness—a beauty which my brother had surely appreciated in more than one sense.

Off in the distance, I could see a chapel that, to my eye, was 13th Century. Its bleak tower pointed symbolically at Heaven, a reminder that life was of the spirit.

A mongrel, with a cinnamon-bun curl to its tail, trotted across the street at a long diagonal. Insects made their brittle sustained music and I was thinking that there would be no point in asking anyone where Mr. Sylvester Carter lived, for my brother would certainly not be using a name that had a notorious connotation all over the world. But the village was so small, I knew I'd be sure to meet up with him before too long. That I might have made an error in deducing his whereabouts occurred to me off and on, but I was certain I hadn't. I prided myself on

knowing precisely how his larcenous mind worked.

I'd visualized the way I'd approach my brother, I don't know how many times on those last eight miles, due north from Siena, on the Florence road. And now I was doing it again. It invariably took one form of poised casualness.

And as I was again hearing myself say, "Why, hello there, Syl. It's good to see you," I noticed one of the town's citizens approaching me. There was no sidewalk; it was just all road. I walked on the right, and he'd been coming towards me down the middle. But when he saw me, there was no question about his having shied away from me, for he practically went off the road. And all the while he did this, he kept his eyes on me as though I were something most unusual and to be feared. He was short, a miniature of a man, stocky, gray-haired, a perfect stereotype of an Italian villager. I expected him to make one of two signs, the sign of the cross, or the other one . . .

I felt tempted to say, "Boo," and set the man running, but instead I said, "*Buon giorno*," a phrase I'd learned from a book. And then "Post office? Where post office?" But, obviously, speaking incorrect English doesn't help an Italian un-

derstand it, for the man continued to stare at me, wordlessly, and now over his shoulder as he continued to walk on and to look back at me.

The postoffice, if there were one, would be a good place to hang around, for Sylvester would probably come there eventually for his mail.

And then my brother's voice—that was exactly like my own—broke into my thoughts, "Ron, Ron . . ." And he was striding from the *locanda*, the small inn, his hand extended to greet me.

The first thing I noticed was his mustache, then that he'd been tanned a deep brown, then that he showed signs of having aged, but he hadn't aged any faster or slower than I had. He'd also put on some weight.

"You've a mustache," I said. "A fellow I passed must have just seen you. That explains why when he came upon me, but minus the mustache, he was really bewildered."

We both laughed.

And then Sylvester, still gripping my hand and my shoulder, too, said, "This is exactly like old times." He was referring to how as kids, and even as adults, we had frequently been mistaken for one another. "Wonderful. Wonderful . . ." And then he drew me to him, embracing me hard so I'd be sure to think he sincerely meant it.

Then he was holding me off for an appraising look and he was saying, "You haven't changed, Ron. Not a bit."

And I thought, "But I have changed—in one important respect." And I heard myself say, "That mustache of yours can hardly be considered a vital change."

"An affectation," he said in good spirits. "But a decorative one. It is wonderful seeing you, Ron. I can't repeat that often enough. I really can't."

What bothered me was that he apparently meant what he was saying. Right from the start it seemed completely sincere—and therefore strange in an eerie kind of way. It puzzled me, and it troubled me. It were as though Syl had expected me and was poised to welcome me.

Syl's home must have been all of a mile from town, but we walked it. And all the way, Syl kept asking me questions about myself. This too was out of character, for Syl had a vast ego primarily concerned with Syl. But he not only asked me questions about my work, but about my friends, and what I did for recreation. They were the sort of questions a brother would ask of a brother in whom he was genuinely interested.

And all the time, not a single word of why I was there, not a

single word of his disappearance. Incredibly, his being overjoyed at seeing me, ostensibly ruled out everything else.

Then we were at his house, a beautiful, huge opulent structure of white stone—marble, for all I knew. It must have been ancient, but it didn't look it. Not like the town or the chapel or anything I'd seen on the trip to Monteriggioni.

The house stopped me in my tracks; it was that kind of a place. I later learned that Syl had leased it from the *Padrone* of Monteriggioni, the local nobility. It had the look of a palace all right.

And as we stood at the start of the long sweeping driveway, Syl for the first time since my arrival spoke in character. "Well, what do you think of the place?" he asked, in a tone that was all pride and showing off.

Tempted to say I hadn't expected to find my future home magnificent on so grand a scale, I found myself not saying what was in my thoughts because I was afraid to. I found myself wishing Syl were not so overpoweringly friendly.

I again had that disturbing feeling that I had been expected, when I saw a woman come out of a front door of the house, lift her hand to arm's length before com-

ing quickly, eagerly, down the drive towards us.

She was Syl's wife, Rosa. To say she was beautiful was sheer understatement. "She must be an Italian movie star," I thought, in a groping attempt to understand her beauty.

At this point, Rosa held my hand in both of hers and smiled up at me and laughed. "You're Ron, of course. But you've no mustache." And then she looked from me to Syl and back again, comparing us in a charming, child-like way that enhanced her beauty. "I'm not sure," she said, her dark eyes bright and laughing, "not sure which I like better."

"As long as you say which, and not whom," Syl said.

Laughter all around followed that. And then Rosa had linked her arm around mine and Syl was latched to my other arm. They both bent forward as they laughed and talked and as we proceeded up the drive to the house.

I was more conscious of Rosa than of anything else, the pressure of her arm, her closeness, movement, the overpowering delicacy of her perfume. Still, permeating this awareness was the feeling that I was being led toward the house. I offered no obvious resistance, of course, but I was aware that I stood a little straighter, held

myself a bit stiffer than was consistent with the camaraderie of the moment.

After the second drink out on the patio—or it may have been the third—I relaxed considerably. I found myself looking at Rosa when I spoke to her, as though there were an intimacy we alone shared. I found that I now felt completely capable of handling Syl, be he friendly or, more naturally, foul.

And then—I don't know how much later it was—I heard myself say, "I never did compliment you on the nice hideaway you have here, did I?"

"No, I don't think you did."

That had been Syl who'd said that. It had been said slowly, carefully. It had sounded more like the old Syl, suave, sure-of-himself, cruel—if cruelty were necessary—opportunistic . . .

This sobered me somewhat. But I'd had enough to drink to lower my inhibition threshold and let my angers and frustrations cross. And Rosa's beauty suddenly angered me. That her beauty, that is, should be one of Syl's possessions.

"You may not believe this, Syl," I said. "But I've always envied all the despicable aspects of your makeup."

"What you're saying, in short, is that you've envied me."

"Precisely." And I was aware I was saying the word the way a drunk would say it, my body dipping down low with its enunciation.

It also occurred to me that this was all like a play—real and not yet real. The patio gave it a theatre-in-the-round quality. And though there was no audience to view our performance, still it was definitely not a rehearsal.

"... Can't say I've admired you," Syl was saying. "But I have envied your being an artist. Any fool can be a success at business."

"Any unscrupulous fool," I corrected him.

"Scruples. Tell me, Ron, why this constant preoccupation with them?"

"But it's not constant. Would I be here, if it were? Surely, good brother, you know why I'm here."

Rosa broke in at this point; she had lines in this play, too. "I have four brothers," she said, "so I know that they have to fight. But let's not spoil welcoming you—"

"I do know why you're here," Syl said, as though his wife hadn't spoken. "And you shouldn't be here. You should be busy painting. But unlike me, you lack directness of purpose."

"I flounder," I said. Even half-

drunk I knew that what my brother was saying was true; I didn't have his single-mindedness, his confidence.

"You shouldn't let anything stand in your way. You should go right to your goal, directly to your goal."

"You—what you giving me, advice?" I asked.

"Yes. Yes, if you're capable of taking it. But you have to be capable of it, Ron. Just as when you drink, you have to be able to hold your liquor."

And, in a vague sort of way, I knew he was right again. Dimly before I passed out, I heard myself muttering, "Trouble with me, like a flounder out of water . . ."

I felt myself twisting and turning with discomfort before I woke up. I lay staring at the darkness, with a half-conscious feeling that something was seriously wrong. I flopped over in the bed onto my back, the sheets all twisted about me, a burntpot taste in my mouth, my stomach unsteady. All the drinking I'd done, and a vague recollection of the conversation I'd had with Sylvester came back to me. That I'd been put to bed angered me. I was the one who was supposed to be in control, running things . . .

I started to sit up. I felt so nauseous and my head so heavy that I didn't make it. But because I suddenly became aware of an overpowering thirst, rolled off the edge of the bed, getting to my feet in a stumbling sort of way.

I soon saw that the half-light of the room was caused by a skylight that was at the end of the room farthest from the bed. I made it to a door that I assumed was a bathroom door, but it was locked. I was still holding to the doorknob, when out of the corner of my eye, to my right, I spotted a door that was open. I knew it was the bathroom door because light from the skylight glinted off a lavatory.

Irrationally, I now grasped the doorknob I was holding with both hands, and started shaking it in an attempt to jerk the door open. But, of course, it didn't yield; it was locked.

I hung to the knob, breathing hard. Then I lumbered around the room, bumping into things in the dim light, searching for another door, another exit. It didn't take long to realize, heavy-headed though I was, that there were just the two doors, the bathroom door and the door that was locked, and that I was a prisoner.

As I stood there in the darkness, I felt the impulse to scream my brother's name, to curse him.

But I knew such a performance would only be further expression of my weakness and ineptitude.

"No," I said the word aloud, defiantly. "No . . . !"

I'd not let Syl get away with anything, I told myself. I moved to the bathroom, splashed water in my face, determined to fight.

I must have slept heavily, because I didn't hear the door being unlocked or opened. Oddly enough, my brother's presence at the foot of my bed awakened me. Just the time it took me to sit up was enough to orient me.

Syl was dressed, informally—chino pants, white sport shirt, a bright crimson belt around his ample middle. He smiled quite benignly as he lifted a tray which he'd apparently placed on the low table at the foot of my bed before I'd awakened.

"Your breakfast, sir," he said, standing stiffly, bowing slightly, mimicking the standard conception of a butler.

Steam and the aroma of coffee rose from the tray. I saw the heavy white napkin, the lustrous silver. Eggs. Toast.

I tore out of bed, in spite of my hangover, moved around Sylvester to the door. "What's the idea locking it?" I demanded. I

grabbed the knob and twisted it, right and left. Sure enough he'd relocked it, after coming into the room. I advanced on him. "Now come on, what gives?"

He was still holding the tray and he started the slow process, purposely slow, of putting down the tray again.

"Well?" I prodded.

But he wouldn't say a word until the tray was down and he'd straightened. "My pajamas, of course, fit you perfectly. As your host—"

I grabbed his arm in a hard, angry grip. "Enough of the amenities!" I shouted. "I want to know what—what this is all about. This—locking of doors."

"You needn't shout," he said in a damnably assumed poise. "And please let go of my arm."

I wanted to say I'd hold onto him until I got a straight answer, but I knew this was the wrong approach—with Sylvester. All rantings and belligerent demands merely put him in a superior and strong position. I had to be suave and cool and collected, too. I had to fight his poise with poise.

"That's better," he said as I released his arm.

"Excuse my rudeness," I said. "I've got a head, feels like barrel hoops around it. You'll excuse me, won't you?"

"Aren't you my guest?"

"Now about the locked door . . ." I said.

He smiled. His smile was like mine, but in my opinion there was a subtle oiliness about his. "As you're aware, I put you to bed last night," he said.

"Yes."

"This room—of course, you know this—is up on the third floor. You see the skylight. I meant it last night when I said I envied you your artistic talent. I'll confess to you, I made a stab at it, at painting." He indicated a stack of framed canvases on the floor and leaning against the wall. "But somehow, I—I couldn't get my heart into it. So I gave it up. Writing—I think creative writing is more to my liking. But even there—as with art—one has to have incentive—be it money, fame, something. You agree don't you? Of course you do."

During this little monologue, I stood watching him as he idly wandered about, talking as he went. He ended up under the skylight. As idly, he absently fingered the cord of the skylight's window-shade that, at the moment, only partially covered the skylight. At one point, he gave a little tug on the cord and released it. With lightning speed the shade whizzed clatteringly around its roller, tak-

ing the cord right along with it.

"Look what I did," Sylvester said, exasperatedly, looking up at the completely exposed skylight. "Have to get a ladder to that—I suppose."

"Why'd you do it," I said, remembering my resolve to be calm, but finding it difficult.

"Do what?"

His look of complete innocence didn't fool me. What he'd done had been done for a reason, and then it occurred to me it might very well be a part of a plot, of which breakfast in bed and the locked door also figured.

I was being kept a prisoner; there was no doubt about that. A regular, normal prisoner, however, knew that all he had to do was serve his sentence and then he would be released. I had no idea how long I was to be kept locked in that room, or why I was being kept locked up, or just what the final outcome of the whole thing would be.

Brother Sylvester continued to be amiable in that wily way of his. He brought me all my meals—every dish delicious, and obviously prepared with a great deal of care, and the servings all very generous. They were really double portions.

More than once I thought, "I'm

a lamb being fattened for the slaughter."

And the idea of escaping by simply rushing Sylvester, when he appeared with the tray, also occurred to me. Holding the tray with both hands would render him pretty helpless. But what about Rosa? I hadn't seen her since that big drinking night. For all I knew, she might be out on the landing backing up her husband with a shotgun. But I was determined to stop throwing my weight around. If I hadn't acted in the foolish way that I had, Sylvester would be the one trapped, instead of myself, which was the way I'd originally planned it. I also examined the windows, but I was three high floors up; the exterior walls were of stone and offered no foot or hand holds. Obviously, no exit there.

I spent my time reading. A paper always came up on the breakfast tray. And Sylvester brought up an armful of books one afternoon, dumping them on the bed. JEAN CHRISTOPHE was the thickest of the lot and, though I had read it a long time ago, I started on it. I was determined to wait my brother out, see what his next move would be and then play it smart. Besides, the meals were good and I was actually enjoying this complete leisure.

But then the very next morning, after this decision of mine to be caged, something of what Sylvester was up to struck me with the impact of a blow. He hadn't as yet arrived with my breakfast tray, and I was lying on the bed, still undressed, reading. Though I hadn't really got very far into CHRISTOPHE, I was nibbling at another of the books. I paused, letting the book drop down on my chest. What I saw was the skylight, and it was either that or something I'd just read that suddenly made the connection, giving me the idea that Sylvester was carefully, meticulously, diabolically preparing to take my place.

Just as I'd thought at the time, Sylvester's fiddling with the string of the skylight's window shade had not been an accident. He'd wanted the sun to stream into the room.

I got out of bed in a hurry, rushed to the bathroom mirror. Staring at myself, eyes wide with sudden fright, I could see, even though I hadn't shaved for days, that I'd acquired as deep a tan as my brother's.

I stepped back and patting my body with both hands I also realized I now had quite a paunch—as sizeable a one as my brother's. All those meals . . . their deliciousness . . . the extra large portions . . .

I had been a lamb—I *was* a lamb and I was *still* being fattened for the slaughter . . .

"Good morning."

I turned quickly and there was Sylvester, tray in hand, smiling.

"You're fattening me for the slaughter." The words came out of me, in a whispered, musing way, but there was also accusation in the way I said them and so they were loud enough and clear enough for Sylvester to hear. "That tray that you've been bringing up so regularly," I was talking directly to my brother now, "wasn't brought up here just to—"

"Why, what's gotten into you?"

Sylvester said that quickly, the smile off his face. And he put down the tray as quickly. And there we stood, confronting one another.

"Take it easy, brother," he said.

"Why?" I felt like springing at his throat. "Why should I take it easy?"

He didn't answer me; just stood there. And then I saw the gun in his hand, that he must have taken off the tray. He didn't have the gun leveled at me, for he was standing with his arms down, the gun in his hand.

"So you're going to shoot me," I said.

He smiled as if to say, "Now you're being ridiculous." And then

he said, "Ron, I'm going to leave you with all this—the house, property, everything. Now, come on and have your breakfast."

"Maybe I've been acting like an idiot," I said. "But I'm no fool. So—just—just bear that in mind."

"You don't believe I intend leaving you everything?"

"Oh, sure. Sure. Of course." I was laughing at the whole idea. "But first I'm to eat my breakfast at gun point. Is that it? But I don't need to eat anymore. Don't you realize I've put on enough weight? That I've got your little paunch. And the sun from up there," I looked up at the skylight, "has given me a tan like yours. The only thing that's missing—"

"The mustache. I was coming around to that, the matter of the mustache. Whether you eat your breakfast or not, Ron, this morning I'd like you to shave."

"And leave a mustache."
"Of course."

"So that you can leave everything to me."

"Exactly. Now you understand me, perfectly. You probably—well, I assume—think I've got some dark, sinister scheme up my sleeve and that—"

"Now just what in the hell do you want of me?" I was losing my temper and shouldn't be, I knew that, but I couldn't stop myself. "Tell

me. Let's stop this pussyfooting. I want to know what this is all about."

He took his time before answering. And then he said, softly, slowly, with infuriating gentleness, "I merely want you to shave—and to leave the mustache."

The gun was up now and leveled on me.

I shaved. I left the mustache. One like his.

And then Sylvester escorted me, walking behind me—the gun still leveled on me—down the two flights of stairs.

I stopped on the landing between the second and third floor, when he said, "And Rosa's to stay behind with you." When he added, "I'm sure you won't mind," he seemed highly amused.

He stood a few steps above me and I was turned on the landing and looking up at him. "And what about Rosa?" I asked, stalling for time—for what purpose I wasn't sure. "Will she mind? Or hasn't she any say in the matter?"

He laughed. But even the way he moved his shoulders, as in genuine laughter, was decidedly forced. "No," he said through his laughter. "No . . ." Then he became suddenly serious. "Let's move along."

I ignored his order. "I've another question," I said. "I hope you don't find it so hilarious."

"All right. Well?"

"Why the gun? That's my question. With all this generosity of yours, why the gun?"

"Just move along," he said.

I turned and started down. "Certainly even to you there must be a certain incongruity—"

"You may be reluctant to accept my gifts," he said. "And I want you to, even if I have to force you to."

When we reached the first landing, I stopped again. I stood there without saying anything. I thought of jumping him, but I knew that he'd shoot me the instant I tried anything. Even though I felt certain that was his eventual intention, I was still restraining myself. "Rosa's in with you on this whole plot," I said, "isn't she?"

"Yes," he said. Then smiled and added, "In a sense. But if you'd go ahead, as I've been telling you to, you'd learn more than by all this interrogation. You still don't believe me when I say that you have to be forced—directly or indirectly—to accept my generosity. You think you understand me, but I know I understand you. If I'd have invited you to come to Monteriggioni, you undoubtedly wouldn't have accepted my invitation. But I knew you'd remember what I said when I got back after the war, about a little hill town in

Italy that some day I'd go back to. And I knew that you knew that when I say I'm going to do something, I do it. So your arrival here was not a surprise. Perhaps you could see in the way I welcomed you that you were expected. I was expecting you, and I was also sure that you'd come to blackmail me. Because I know the sort of person you are, basically. Nothing extrasensory about it; just a little applied intelligence."

"And now what?" I asked.

"Go on, as I've been telling you, and you'll see."

Rosa lay on the bed, on a diagonal, her face white, blouse blood-soaked. He'd shot her. And now he was going to shoot me . . .

I turned and faced him. "My brother," I said bitterly. "My dear brother."

His gun was at his waist. And just before he fired it, I heard him say, "I told you, Ron, that I was going to leave you everything—"

The man who called himself Ron Carter turned from the typewriter. He started to read aloud the last sentence he'd written, but suddenly realizing that his wife was present, and not wanting her to hear, finished more quietly, "I

told you, Ron, that I was going to leave you everything—”

He thought over what he had just read, shaking his head. “Something wrong here,” he said as he arose and walked the length of the cold water flat to where his wife sat reading on the lounge. “Fran, there’s an awful flaw in the conclusion of all those first person stories in which the narrator is killed in the last paragraph. The person reading such a story has a perfect right to ask, ‘Well, if he was killed, how was he able to write the closing words of the script?’” Of course, he thought, this one was told by the man who was killed, but written by the man with the gun.

“Oh, you’ve finished it,” Fran said excitedly. She put her book to one side. Like Rosa of the story that had just been written, she was a decided brunette and beautiful. And though she had been born in Mt. Vernon, N. Y., she was of Italian parentage. “Oh, oh, I’d love to read it.”

“No doubt you would,” her husband said.

“You mean I can’t?” Fran rose and went to him.

“Acting injured will do you no

good,” he said, and thought that though she knew he had a twin brother, it would serve no earthly purpose for her to know that he himself was an embezzler and was guilty of fratricide. No point in telling her that one crime had made flight necessary; the other had made his return possible.

“Why can’t I read it?” Fran pouted, played the child. “It’s autobiographical isn’t it? I know most first stories are. Does it have your other girls in it, is that why you don’t want me to read it?”

“Exactly.” He was humoring her now.

A playful game started: Fran laughing, trying to reach around her husband to get at the script and he laughing, turning and keeping her from grasping it.

Finally, he evaded her, turned his back completely to her and tore the script in half. Then he went quickly to the coal-burning stove and threw the script into the fire.

Fran stood pouting.

“It was merely a writing exercise,” he said. He’d never intended anyone to read it.

“I don’t believe it,” she said. “I don’t care if you loved someone else . . .”



A HOUSE IS A PLUM

by Donald Honig

MOROSE and sad-eyed, Big Jim Gulliver was waiting at the corner table in Monte's cafe for his friend, mentor and leader, Cliffy. Big Jim would hardly dare to coin a thought without first consulting Cliffy. This loyalty, this abject dependency, was a logically shaped state of mind, for Cliffy's ideas were seldom failures, even though Jim greeted each one with a caution that inevitably stretched into pessimism.

So now, even before his complex mental reasoning had been exposed to the latest scheme, Jim was saying over and over to himself, "It won't work. It can't work."

And then Cliffy came through the door, a thin stick of bustling, eager confidence. At times he exuded an enthusiasm that was absolutely oppressive. Jim's sad, heavy-

ly-lidded eyes fixed upon his mentor as if asking for consolation. Cliffy, as ever, oblivious of his partner's depressing attitude, sat down at the table as though a feast were shortly to appear.

"It's all worked out," he said, speaking—as he frequently did—from out of the middle of a thought, though not because he knew Jim would soon catch up, but because he knew Jim never would, so it made little difference at just what point he opened his exposition.

"What's all worked out?" Jim asked.

"The job. We're pulling it tonight," said Cliffy. He laid his smooth, tapered fingers on the table as though about to begin a concerto. "I've been casing it for some time. Thoroughness, Jim, that's

Since Santa Claus knows when you are good or bad, it has been deemed advisable to be good for goodness sake. Our small morality play deals with the fine distinctions between being naughty or being nice and tells precisely why an individual should know the way to carry the sleigh.

the key word, always remember it."

Jim pondered this profundity, then let it fall from his mind.

"There's this swell ranch house just outside of town," said Cliffy.

"They're rich, real rich."

"Who is?" Jim asked.

"The people who live there. The Banners. The house reeks of opulence. Two cars in the garage. A gardener who comes in once a week to manicure the lawn, whether it needs it or not. A mink coat on the missus. It's all there, Jim boy. I followed the lady of the house into the supermarket one day and, Jim boy, she puts on real living diamonds just to go out and buy a dozen eggs. Those diamonds alone were worth a thousand, unless I have a sty in my eye. And their dachshund looks better fed than some of our Congressmen."

"How do you know we can break in and get away with it?"

Jim asked gloomily. "What about the neighbors?"

"They have trees for neighbors. Listen, I've been watching the Banners for a month. Every Tuesday is movie night. Out sweeps Mr. Banner and Mrs. and little Teddy. From eight to twelve, every Tuesday. We have four glorious hours in which to plunder."

"It sounds too easy," said Big Jim.

"Of course it is," said Cliffy. "Why do you think I picked this place? Thoroughness, that's the key word."

At eight o'clock that Tuesday night, sitting in their car a block away, Cliffy and Jim watched the Banners leave the house and drive off.

Cliffy patted Jim on the shoulder. "We've just been invited to a housebreaking, Jim boy," he said.

They parked in front of the neat, elegant house and got out of the car. The quiet residential streets, lined with thick, conspiratorial trees, were empty. After having a discreet look up and down, Cliffy said,

"All right, Jim boy. Advance."

The two stole up the driveway, the pebbles rattling underfoot. A row of downstairs windows presented themselves.

"How are we going to do it?" Jim asked.

"It's always been my experience," whispered Cliffy, "that the best methods are generally supplied by spontaneous ingenuity. It's all part of a central nervous system men of our profession must have and actively employ. The best laid plans of the most thorough men often succeed only because they know how best to use their

intuition. Now, my intuition tells me that one of these windows was probably left unlocked. It stands to reason, doesn't it, Jim? Would a housewife be that careful or that suspicious that she would endeavor to lock every window? Of course not."

The theory both charmed and fascinated Big Jim. He could have wept, he was so happy. So they set about trying each window. Gradually, the theory melted and finally disappeared completely into disrepute; every window was stubbornly locked.

"Why don't we just bust one in?" asked Jim.

"No, Jim," Cliff said. In his voice was the gentle patience which Jim heard in no other. "Breaking glass carries little tinkly echoes where echoes should never go. We'll try the cellar windows."

They did. But the cellar windows, like their more elevated brethren above, refused to yield. But not even this failure could diminish Cliff's resolution; if anything, it only whetted the more piquantly his mischievous appetite.

"It means there's something inside that's worth stealing," said Cliff. "Beggars never lock their doors."

"Then how are we going to get inside?" Big Jim asked. Now his hopes had been raised by the sug-

gestion of great wealth, and yet there persisted in his voice the gloom of expectant defeat, as though they were wrestling with supernatural powers.

"We'll get inside, don't you worry, Jim boy," Cliff said. He clenched his fists for meditative assistance. The night was quite reverently still around them, as if it, too, had taken an interest in this affair. Then Cliff said, "Let's try the cellar door."

They hurried around to the yard. Behind some tall and coolly poised shrubbery was another house. It forced certain inhibitions upon them. They tried the cellar door. It was as soundly locked as was the rest of the house, which was now beginning to assume the aspect of a gloating fortress.

"We can smash the door," said Jim.

"It would be like ringing a bell, Jim," Cliff said, shading his voice with regret to show that he nevertheless appreciated the sincerity behind the absurd suggestion.

Cliff withdrew to gain some perspective. He gazed profoundly at the house, searching for the weakness. For all houses had weaknesses. He knew that. Then, in a slowly warming voice which threatened to become enthralled, he said,

"Jim, do you see what I see?"

"What do you see?"

"A chimney."

"A chimney?"

"Absolutely. You can go in like Santa Claus, open a window from the inside and we can have a real Christmas."

"How do we get up on the roof?" asked Jim.

Cliffy looked at the garage. "There must be a ladder in there," he said. "People always have ladders in garages."

They went to the garage and Big Jim bent and took hold of one of the door handles. Much to his surprise, and to Cliffy's pleasure, the door lifted and began to roll back with a sullen rattle which echoed grumbly through the dark garage. Cliffy stepped in and lit a match. There was a ladder, standing against the wall. He looked smugly at Jim, who returned his glance with a grin of almost inhuman pleasure. Jim went forth and took the ladder in his hands. Cliffy directed him to the side of the house and there the ladder was fixed solidly on the ground and leaned carefully against the house.

"Now I want you to get up there and go down the chimney," said Cliffy.

"You're smaller," said Big Jim with the pure, concise, knifelike logic of the unschooled.

"See here, Jim, it wouldn't do for me to go falling down a chimney. I'm the president."

It was a mortifying moment for Jim. He felt stung by his own audacity. He tugged at his underlip. But he received a reassuring pat on the shoulder from the president.

Jim began the ascent. It was slow and laborious. The ladder entered a creaky protest. Then Jim's huge form disappeared over the edge of the roof. Cliffy rubbed his hands. It was a grand feeling. He waited, lips parted in anticipation. Then he heard a plaintive wail. His name was in it.

"Jim?" he asked, lifting his face and speaking to the top of the ladder which reached vacantly toward the sky.

"Cliffy," Jim wailed again. The voice sounded as if its owner were standing in ice water.

Cliffy scampered up the ladder. Arriving at the roof, a most unusual spectacle presented itself. Jim was up to his broad chest in chimney, his face turned awkwardly, helplessly at Cliffy.

"I can't move, Cliffy," Jim said.

"Which way?" Cliffy asked, advancing toward him.

"Neither," said Jim. His face looked like a nervous cherub's. He had one arm still in use and Cliffy took this and pulled and pulled until Jim begged him to stop.

Then Cliffy put both his hands on Jim's square shoulders and tried to jam him down. This effort produced nothing but some breathless grunting from its victim; in fact, if anything, it wedged Jim in all the more securely. He now filled the chimney as grimly as though he had been cemented there.

"Cliffy," he said, "do something."

"What can I do, Jim boy?" Cliffy asked. "You won't move either way."

There was a huge gasp. "I can hardly breathe," Jim said tersely.

"Try and relax," said Cliffy.

"Suppose a fire starts down there?"

"Stop thinking those things." Cliffy gave him another shove, but Jim was like a stone wall. He did not have enough play even to tremble. Only his close-cropped head moved, like some obtuse weather-vane. The one fat arm hung limp.

"I'll have to go and get some tools," Cliffy said.

"Tools?"

"I'll dismantle the chimney and get you out that way."

"Can you do it?"

"Of course."

Suddenly, they became bathed in an intrusion of light. Their faces turned, gaping. A policeman, at

the top of the ladder, was shining the light full on them.

"All right, boys," the policeman said from behind the intense white light. "Come on down."

Cliffy obeyed. But it took the fire department to finally extricate Big Jim. Mr. Banner, owner of the house, danced with anguish as he watched the muttering firefighters dismantle his chimney. They did this carefully, but took an eye from their prisoner for a moment and in this moment he abruptly disappeared with a yelp down the chute. A thud from below ensued, then silence.

Later, the two would-be house breakers were being recorded by the local police station. Mr. Banner was right there to make sure, glaring angrily at them. But it wasn't Mr. Banner who was annoying Cliffy, however. It was something else.

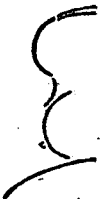
"How were we caught?" he asked. "Did someone see us up there?"

"Yes," one of the policemen said. "Mr. Banner did."

"I thought you were at the movies," Cliffy said, turning to Mr. Banner as if accusing him of a foul.

"I was," said Mr. Banner. "Until I remembered I'd forgotten to lock the front door. That's why I rushed home."

Why do banks have marble floors? I assume it is to render the footing of holdup men uncertain—embarrassingly so. And there is also this to be considered. Whenever the bank's president is tied up by thieves, naturally nothing but marble is good enough or expensive enough for him to lie on.



I USUALLY buy a mystery story magazine to kill the tedium of a plane ride, but this time I didn't need it. The man who had the window seat beside me was better than any magazine.

He was middle-aged and dressed conservatively but rather carelessly. He had a double chin and bushy brows, over, gentle brown eyes. When I sat down in the aisle seat beside him before take-off, he glanced casually at me. I wanted to start a conversation but just couldn't do it. And he didn't say anything until we were airborne and had unsnapped our seat belts.

His opening remark was purely tentative, a friendly overture. He said, "I see you're a mystery story fan," his eyes going to the magazine in my hand.

"Not really a fan," I said, "but I find them a pleasant way to pass the time on a plane ride."

"I'm not really a fan, either," he said. "I read mystery stories as much to keep up-to-date on the new criminal techniques as anything else."

"That could mislead a lot of peo-

ple," I said, making a pleasantry of it, "into thinking you were a crook reading your trade journals."

He grinned disarmingly. "It's not as bad as that," he said. "I work for a bank. Banks deal in money, and money draws criminals. I want to be ready for trouble if they try anything on the bank where I work, that's all." He added companionably, "My name's Colbaugh."

"Mine's Dickson," I said. "Glad to know you."

He said, "I was mixed up in a bank robbery once myself, at the Merchants National Bank in . . ." He named a small California town. "So I know how unexpectedly such things can happen."

"It sounds exciting," I remarked idly.

He shrugged. "You could call it exciting, all right." He leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes, evidently considering the amenities preserved.

But I wanted to get the story out of him, hear him tell it. "Tell me about it," I said.

"You'll be bored," he protested, opening his eyes again. "But all

right. It's not a very long story. And it happened twenty years ago. I was a kind of assistant-assistant cashier at the bank—a clerk, really. We had a night depository at the bank where the town's merchants could deposit their cash for safe-keeping after their stores closed up for the night. And as all the stores stayed open until nine o'clock on Thursday evenings in those days, there was always a good bit of cash to be found in our night depository on Friday mornings."

"I know how that goes," I said. "I own a sporting goods store in Fresno."

"Oh, really? That's a nice part of the country. Well, one of my jobs

was to get down to the bank early in the mornings and clean out the deposits in the night depository so I could have them all tallied and on the assistant cashier's desk when he arrived for work at opening time. So I was always the first one there; other employees would begin to drift in about fifteen minutes before opening time, but I had the bank to myself for a good half hour each morning. And I kind of liked it, you know? It made me feel responsible to have the run of the place before anybody else got there."

I nodded comprehendingly.

"Well, one morning I left my house about eight o'clock as usual,

by **James Holding**

Once upon a bank floor . . .



and I was standing on my regular corner waiting for the bus that I rode to work, when a gray Ford sedan came along and stopped beside the bus stand and the driver leaned over and asked me if I wanted a lift downtown. I said sure and got in beside him when he pushed the car door open for me."

"In a mystery story," I said wisely, "you'd have been suspicious of the guy for offering you something for nothing. You'd have said no thanks and waited for your bus."

"Very probably. But it never entered my mind there was any hanky-panky afoot that morning. I got into the Ford and only then realized that there were two other men sitting in the back seat behind the driver and me. The thing that struck me most forcibly about them, was that the one on the right held a long-barreled revolver of some sort in his hand, and it was pointed right at me. The gun didn't have any sights on the front. I remember noticing that in my shock and surprise."

"Sounds like a Woodsman with the sights filed off," I said. "Kind of a target pistol. I sell them in my store. That joker must have been a crack shot to work with a sporting gun like that."

"As far as I was concerned, he certainly was! I didn't say or do a

single thing to attract attention to my plight, I can assure you, because the man with the gun told me not to. And that was a plenty good enough reason for me.

"We drove to the bank in dead silence, but at a very sedate speed. The driver stopped the Ford at the rear of the bank where I always went in, just as though he knew all about my daily routine. The bank backed on a narrow lane, or alley, and the rear door was used only by employees. At that early hour, the lane was deserted.

"The man with the gun said to me, 'Here we are, Buster. Out.' He motioned for me to get out of the car. He and the other man in the back seat got out, too. The gun-bearer was tall and blond and skinny, painfully thin. The other fellow was chunky and had fuzzy black hair growing down the back of his neck all the way to his collar, I remember that. The tall one said to the driver, 'Stay with the crate,' and then to me, 'Now, let's open up and go inside, if you don't mind.' His voice was cool and polite and unhurried, as though he did this sort of thing every day. Maybe he did.

"I couldn't see much point in arguing when that long gun barrel was poking into my back, so I got out my keys and opened the door. As I put the key in the lock, my

sleeve pulled back, and I saw by my wrist watch it was only 8:15—still quite awhile before I could expect the bank guard or any of our other employees to show up. But I knew the time lock on the vault was set for just a few minutes before the bank opened, and I was pretty sure they couldn't do anything about *that*, unless they waited for opening time.

"We went inside. The tall man shattered any frail hopes I'd entertained with four words. He said to me, 'The night depository, Junior,' and I realized then that they *did* know what my routine was. They must have watched me for a few mornings to see what I did. I believe that's what they call 'casing the joint', isn't it, Mr. Dickson?"

Colbaugh looked at me expectantly, as though wanting me to compliment him on his command of thieves' argot, derived, no doubt, from his reading of mystery stories. I said, "Yeah." It *was* strange to hear the expression come from the lips of this dignified middle-aged bank clerk.

"They forced me," he continued, "toward the night depository receptacle in the wall of the bank inside the front door. In those days, they didn't have solid-ranks of all-glass, electric-eye doors for bank entrances the way we do now. Our bank just had a regular steel-frame front

door with glass in it down to knee-height like any store door. And, there was a venetian blind on the inside of this door to keep the afternoon sun out of the eyes of Mr. Johnson, one of our vice presidents, whose desk was just to the right of the entrance. This blind was lowered after the sun moved around into Mr. Johnson's eyes every afternoon. And, it was left like that—lowered—until I came to work the next day, when I raised it as my first official act each morning on my way to clean out the night depository." Mr. Colbaugh turned his serene eyes on me and said deprecatingly, "You can see I had a lot of odd chores to do around the bank, Mr. Dickson. I was almost the janitor, really." He laughed before he went on.

"Even with the gun in my back, habit was strong in me that morning; I reached out automatically to raise Mr. Johnson's venetian blind on the front door as we went by. But the man behind me with the gun said, 'What do you think you're doing? Freeze!' I froze. I said, 'I raise this blind every morning. I was just going to draw it up . . . ' 'Today,' he said, 'we won't raise it, Junior. If you don't mind. You think we want every jerk on the sidewalk to see what's going on in here?'"

"I thought I ought to make some

token effort, at least, to resist the robbers, so as we approached the night depository, I said, in what I fear was a not very convincing voice, 'I can't open this thing. It takes a special key. The assistant-cashier carries the only key, and he won't be here till the bank opens.'

"The short man didn't say anything, merely pulled a gun out of his pocket and went to stand beside the front door, looking out into the street through the slats of the lowered blind but hidden from the the eyes of anybody outside. But the tall thin man jabbed his gun barrel harder than ever into my spine. 'Don't give me that, Buster,' he said. 'I know who opens this thing every morning. *You*. So fly at it. And don't make me wait. My nerves are getting pretty jumpy.' He didn't sound a bit nervous to me."

"But *you* must have been," I put in.

Mr. Colbaugh nodded vigorously. "I was terrified. Almost stiff with fright. I got out my key to the depository box and opened it up as meek as Moses. What else could I do?"

"I would have done the same," I consoled him.

"This was Friday morning, and there was quite a large amount of cash and a lot of checks in the depository from the merchants'

Thursday night receipts. The tall man grunted with satisfaction when he saw how much was there. 'Clean it out,' he ordered me, 'and put it in this.' He held out a black briefcase to me.

"I did as he said, but I moved as slowly as possible without it seeming too obvious. Maybe I could delay them a little, I thought. But, when the money and the checks were all in the briefcase, it was still only eight-thirty.

"I was beginning to wonder what they intended to do with me when they left. I didn't feel sanguine about that at all. I'd seen their faces. I could describe them to the police. I could identify them. And, I'd ridden in their Ford and could identify it, too, for I'd memorized the license number when I got out of the car at the rear of the bank.

"The tall man said, 'Lay down on the floor, buddy . . . on your back.' I did so. Right in the middle of the marble lobby. I felt very foolish, I can tell you. And very exposed, too. For the short man at the front door could keep me covered with his gun and watch out the door, too.

"The tall man took a look at his wrist watch. And just then the telephone rang. It was the telephone on Mr. Johnson's desk by the front door. It sounded like a fire alarm

in that empty bank. I was so startled, I jumped, if you can really jump when you're lying flat on your back on the floor. The tall man stooped over me and prodded me in the stomach with his gun.

"Get that, you!" he barked at me. All his polite coolness was gone now. 'Answer that phone! And make it sound natural, Buster, or you'll never live to take another phone call! Move!'

"The phone was ringing for the third time. 'Hold the receiver away from your ear,' he warned me, 'so I can hear it, too.'

"I got up from the floor and went over and picked up the telephone, with the tall man right beside me. The short one hadn't said anything, but his gun was trained on me, now. I cleared my throat and said, 'Hello?' into the receiver, loud and clear. 'Is this the Farmers National?' came the tinny inquiry, as I held the receiver so the tall man could hear it.

"His gun was boring into my back. 'Yes, sir,' I said into the phone.

"How late do you stay open this afternoon?" the voice asked. I looked at the bandit beside me and raised my eyebrows.

"Tell him!" he whispered.

"I said into the phone, 'We close at three-thirty, sir.'"

"Thanks," came the answer, and

we could both hear the sharp click that sounded as the caller hung up.

"I put down the phone. There was sweat on my forehead and I felt sick. I looked at the short man's gun that was aimed at my mid-section from five feet away, and my knees shook. The tall man let out his breath in a 'whoosh' of relief.

"Okay, Shiner," he said to his pal, 'back to the door.' And to me, 'And you get back where you were, Buster.' He waved his gun at me. I lay down on the floor again.

"Plenty of time, Shiner," he called to his partner, then. 'Watch the kid, here. I'm going to take a look in the tellers' cages.'

"He went out of my sight, then, and I could hear him jerking open the cash drawers and swearing when he found them empty.

"I could see the minute hand on our big wall clock above the New Accounts desk moving with tiny jerks; one jerk for every thousand years, it seemed to me. It made four of these jerks by the time the tall man was satisfied that he wasn't overlooking anything in the tellers' cages. I could have told him we always locked up the cash in the vault.

"He came out into the lobby again where Shiner and I were, the briefcase in his left hand, his gun in his right. He motioned Shiner toward the rear door of the bank,

the way we'd come in. So they weren't going to wait for the time lock on the vault. They were leaving. I could hear my heart thudding against the marble floor, as though the floor were a sounding board.

"Shiner left his post by the front door. 'What about him?' he asked the tall one, pointing his gun at me.

"'Put him out,' the other one said matter-of-factly, 'the way I told you.'"

Mr. Colbaugh turned and looked at me with a smile softening his mouth and crinkling up his eyes. "I can tell you, Mr. Dickson, I was awfully scared at that point. I didn't know whether they meant to kill me or just knock me out, or what. 'Put him out' could have meant anything. Then I saw Shiner reversing his gun in his hand and leaning over me and swinging the butt at my head, and that's all I saw for awhile."

I said, "The banking business has more hazards than I'd realized."

"It has indeed," he said. "I found out later that the bandits had another car waiting for them half a mile away, and that the Ford had been stolen. They were from out of state, it developed, and unknown in our town. So they didn't think it necessary to kill me. They just put me out of business while they made their getaway."

"So what happened?" I asked, the way a good listener should.

"The police took them easily as they emerged from the rear door of the bank," Colbaugh said. "The driver of the Ford was already in custody. The police had the bank surrounded."

We could hear the motors change pitch as our plane started to let down for a landing.

"The police!" I said, astounded. "Where'd *they* come from?"

"Johnny Sampson sent them."

I looked at him blankly. "Who was Johnny Sampson?"

"We went to high school together," Colbaugh said. "He was my best friend in the bank, a teller."

"What made him send for the police?"

"When he telephoned the bank and asked the closing time, I told him 3:30. But he knew it closed at 3:00. So that was his signal. To call the police."

I reached up for my hat and coat as I saw the airport runways coming up to meet us.

"You mean that telephone call was rigged?" I asked. "You had it all arranged with Sampson beforehand?"

"Sure." He smiled, pleased at my surprise. "That's what I meant when I said I liked to be ready for trouble at the bank. Johnny and I had it all worked out."

"Wait a minute," I protested. "Even so, how did Sampson know he should call you that particular morning? Did he do it every day?"

"Oh, no. Johnny was a bachelor," Colbaugh said, as though that explained everything. "He always ate his breakfast around the corner at Mother Hague's Coffee Shop before coming to work at the bank. He passed the bank entrance to get to the coffee shop at the same time every morning—8:20. And if he ever saw that the venetian blind on the bank's front door was still lowered when he went to breakfast, he was supposed to telephone the bank and ask what time it closed. If I answered and gave him the wrong closing time, call the police. If anybody but me answered, call the police. If nobody answered, call the police. You see how simple it was?"

"Very simple," I said, "if anything as complicated as that can be simple. What if you were sick and didn't come to work some morning and, therefore, failed to raise the venetian blind?"

"If I was sick, my wife phoned Sampson at his home before he went to breakfast and told him the venetian blind would be down when he passed it."

"How about Sampson, though? Suppose he'd been sick on the day of the hold-up?"

"An unlikely coincidence," Col-

baugh said. "I guess that would have been just too bad for me and the night deposits."

I unfastened my seat belt as I felt the wheels touch down. "I'd say it was too bad for you anyway, wasn't it? You were the 'inside' man of your live burglar alarm system. You took the chances. You got knocked silly by the hold-up men, while your friend Sampson ate bacon and eggs in Mother Hague's Coffee Shop."

We stood up.

"Yes, that's true, I suppose," Colbaugh conceded. "But we were young. And, as you suggested earlier, it *was* exciting. You have no idea, Mr. Dickson, how exciting it is to see a gun butt being swung at your head and then not be sure until two hours later when you regain consciousness, that you haven't been murdered!"

I said, "Are you still with Merchants National?"

"Yes, still at the same old stand. So's Johnny Sampson. He's the president of the bank now."

"Good for him. Virtue's reward. And what's your job these days, Mr. Colbaugh?"

"I'm chairman of the board," he said, smiling. "Still taking the chances, you see."

"Now, I've got the whole story." I said ambiguously. "Right down to the present."

We walked down the ramp into the airport terminal together. I was slightly behind him. My topcoat was over my right arm. On impulse, when we got inside the terminal lobby, I pushed my forefinger into his back, under cover of my topcoat, and said, "Turn left, Mr. Colbaugh, and go into the men's room, will you?"

He reacted quite calmly. His eyes widened a little as they swiveled toward me. He stiffened slightly, and I could feel his back muscles come up under my finger for a second. Then he said, "The washroom? Why?" But he kept on walking.

"Now don't tell me that your assistant cashier has the only key to *this*," I said. "Here we are. Go on in."

We went in. It was a slack time; the washroom was empty, as I'd hoped.

When the door swished shut behind us, I took my forefinger out of Colbaugh's back and he turned toward me. He really looked at me this time, tilting his head back to gaze up into my face. And he got it right away.

He said, "You've taken on a good bit of weight since then, Dickson. And changed your name. Do you really own a sporting goods store in Fresno?"

"I was anticipating there a little,"

I said, smiling at him. "I *clerk* in a sporting goods store, and I have a wonderful opportunity to buy into it if I can raise two thousand dollars by the end of this week."

"Oh," Colbaugh said. "You're going straight, then?"

"I'm trying to, since I got out." I held up my finger. "I don't file the sights off my guns any more, you see?"

He said, "Why don't you swing a loan?"

"Did you ever know anybody who would lend money to an ex-con? I've tried."

"You didn't try our bank."

"I was going to. At least I went to your bank this morning to make an appeal to you personally, if you still worked there."

"Why didn't you?"

"I lost my nerve when I saw your line-up of loan officers and vice presidents. I knew they'd nix me for sure. It had to be you or nobody."

"So you followed me onto the plane, is that it?"

"Yes. I happened to see you walk through the bank with your hat and coat and overnight bag and get into the airport taxi. I recognized you right away. So, I followed you to the airport and bought a seat on the same flight."

He nodded, his face expressionless. "Two thousand dollars?"

"That's all. And I have no col-
lateral, Mr. Colbaugh."

He allowed himself a tight smile.
"You told Shiner to put me out
that day, Dickson. He clubbed me
with a gun. And remember I was
just a kid."

"I know it. And I'm not proud
of it. But think of it this way, Mr.
Colbaugh. Wasn't your successful
prevention of that bank robbery the
first thing that made your bank
management really *notice* you and
Sampson? Isn't that what triggered
the whole series of promotions that
led you both to the top jobs you
have today?"

I watched him narrowly, tempo-
rarily forgetting to breathe. For this
was the only weapon I could use in
my second hold-up of Colbaugh.

He didn't say anything for a
minute, thinking it over. Then, his
lips curled up a trifle, and I began to
breathe again.

"You know," he said, "I think
you're right, Dickson. It *was*
through you that I first drew favor-
able notice at the bank. I never
thought of it like that before, but in
a sort of cock-eyed way, I suppose
I owe you something for it. And
so does Sampson."

"How about a thousand dollars
apiece? You could call it a personal
loan, Mr. Colbaugh. And I'll pay it
back."

He made up his mind quickly.
"I believe you will, at that," he said.
He got out his checkbook and
wrote out a check to cash for two
thousand dollars. As he handed it
to me, and we shook hands, he said
curiously, "Why'd you bring me in
here? Why not brace me in the
plane or out in the lobby?"

I looked around at the bare
white-tiled walls of the washroom
and grinned at him. "No venetian
blinds in here," I said.



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ROBOT With A GUN

by Mann Rubin

PREISELY at two o'clock each afternoon, Dr. Millard Newman took a break for lunch. He was a psychoanalyst with an office on Park Avenue and a calendar of appointments so crowded his lunch hour seldom exceeded forty min-

utes. However, on this particular day he had had an earlier cancellation and was looking forward to a leisurely hour and a half to digest his food and perhaps even begin an article on Death, Dreams and Dogma, which he had promised one of the more prominent analytical magazines.

He had ordered a sandwich and coffee from a neighborhood drugstore, and therefore was not surprised when he heard his outside door open and close rather swiftly. The weather must have turned windier, he thought, and searched his pockets for change to give the delivery boy when he signaled his arrival via the buzzer on the wall of Dr. Newman's waiting room.


No signal came. After a time Dr. Newman, his appetite more whetted than his curiosity, rose from his desk and left his office, crossed a thickly carpeted corridor, and peered into the waiting room.

A mechanical robot was standing there. Dr. Newman knew it was a robot even though a raincoat covered the main body of steel, and dark glasses and a Stetson softened the contours of the dome-like head. The robot's metal hand was holding a gun.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded the doctor.

The robot whirled clumsily. Microscope eyes suddenly focused

By means of one carefully chosen word, you may condemn all those to whom it so conveniently applies. Call a man a robot and you've covered a great deal of territory, quickly, succinctly, and—shall we say—dramatically. Such all-embracing derogatory words are truly timesavers.



in on Dr. Newman and recorded his dimensions. It was like standing before the open lens of a gigantic camera. The steel fist gripping the gun remained tight, steady.

"Dr. Newman? Dr. Millard Newman?" The words scraped out nervously, statically from batteries deep within the robot's shell.

"Yes. But I warn you, I have no money or drugs and I won't tolerate any firearms in this office." He started forward, more amazed by his firm control of his voice than he was by the presence of this intruder.

"Keep back," thundered the robot. "I'll kill you if you come a step closer!"

Dr. Newman paused. There was something desperate in the robot's movements, something lost and frightened in his voice vibrations.

"What are you doing here? What is it you want?"

"I . . . I don't know." Dr. Newman sensed behind the robot's difficult, halting speech a tormented, groping creature struggling with a problem that appeared to be

overwhelming him. Dr. Newman had seen the exact behavior pattern in enough of his patients to recognize the same symptoms in this mechanical being; the knot in his middle melted, his manner became casual, his voice took on a professional tone.

"You've come to me for help, haven't you?"

". . . Yes."

"What seems to be your trouble?"

The robot's head rotated toward him again, once more he could feel himself being scrutinized by cells within cells. "Are we alone?"

He nodded understandingly; most of his patients felt frightened and reluctant at their first interview.

"Feel free to speak."

"I'm here because I've read some of your articles and seen you on television. I thought you might help me rid myself of this terrible hate I carry. You see, I feel an urge to kill, to kill everybody."

Dr. Newman stroked his chin pensively. "Why don't we step into my private office? I think you'll find it more relaxing." He indicat-

ed the door. The robot sighed, turned, and ponderously started toward the private chamber.

Suddenly, the door chimes sounded and pounding was heard outside. Obviously, the robot had turned the latch when he entered; the delivery boy was locked out. Dr. Newman moved to remedy the situation, but even as he turned the robot was upon him, blocking the way, lights zig-zagging across his dome like an electric storm, his metal fingers again arched around the gun's trigger.

"I told you no tricks," bellowed the robot.

"But it's only my lunch."

"You're lying."

"This is ridiculous." He side-stepped the robot's arm and crossed toward the door; he wasn't one to be intimidated by misdirected aggressions. Suddenly his arm was gripped by a metal hand so strong it seemed capable of pulverizing bones. He tried to struggle free, but found it useless. He felt himself being lifted off the floor and swung through space. A moment later he crashed into a back wall with the momentum of a pile-driver. The effect was shattering; he felt dazed, without equilibrium; he sensed he was in greater danger than at any time in his existence. The robot's arm came down again, this time with much less velocity,

and pulled him roughly to his feet.

"Who's out there?"

"I told you, it's the boy with my lunch," he mumbled shakily. "You've got to learn to trust me."

The metal hand stayed tightly at his throat, while the series of bulbs just inside the plexiglass window of the dome weighed and certified the depth of his sincerity. At last a verdict was rendered; the pressure at his throat lessened.

"All right," the robot said, "I'll take a chance. Only get rid of him fast or I kill both you and him. And no funny business. I'm endowed with twenty-twenty electric eye vision. I'll be right behind the door watching you."

Dr. Newman was shoved forward roughly. He knew if he ever expected to leave his office again in one piece, he had to conquer and cage the twisted, distorted animal that stalked the robot's psyche. Into the dark despair and hopelessness of his centrifugal thinking, he had to bring a glimmer of sunlight.

He stepped to the door trying his best to appear calm, unhurried. Years of experience had taught him that any sign of distress he revealed always killed off any hope of communication between himself and his patient. Apparently the robot needed a father image; he resolved to prove himself strong, no

matter how trying the circumstances.

Therefore, a moment later, when he opened the door to the delivery boy his manner was amiable and relaxed. He chatted with the boy about current baseball scores and tipped him an extra quarter before sending him on his way. Anyone seeing Dr. Newman would have thought him the most natural, carefree man in the world. A minute later, he and the robot were facing each other in his private consultation room.

"Take off your coat and sit down, anywhere," he suggested.

The robot grunted and studied his surroundings. Beams of light continued to flash across his dome each time his eyes made contact with a new piece of furniture. After a time he groped his way out of his coat and hat and laid them neatly on a chair. The gun never left his hand.

"Now then," began Dr. Newman, seating himself at his desk, "what exactly do you feel is the gist of your problem?"

Steel-rimmed arms stirred anxiously, searching for expression, heavy static choked back the words trying to form deep inside the barrel chest. Finally: "I don't know. I'm sick. I'm sick. Everyone laughs at me, holds me up to ridicule. Nobody understands."

A long silence followed, broken intermittently by muffled sobs. Dr. Newman realized the robot was attempting to cry.

"I'm sorry," said the robot. "You can see I'm quite neurotic."

Dr. Newman pushed the box of Kleenex toward him. "Why don't you begin at the beginning?"

The robot ignored his gesture, continued to study him guardedly. "What's that couch for?"

"To lie down on. Why don't you try it? I think you'll find it more relaxing."

"It's a trick to take my gun away."

"You have my word I won't try to disarm you. Just try the couch."

"Is that what your other patients use?"

"Most of them. It helps, believe me."

Laboring, suspicious, and with measured steps the robot did as instructed. As he sat down Dr. Newman was able to study him in more detail. In length the bulbous shape measured about six feet. Below the main body two stilt-like legs provided balance and agility. The two arms were slightly smaller in size and projected out from the shoulders. The head was made of polished steel, with small square openings for the eyes, nose and mouth, and was attached to the body by a short stub of a

neck. Stabs of light continued to circulate across the transparent section of the dome. The robot wheezed and fumbled and shook spasmodically. He assumed a sitting position, his back against the wall, the gun near at hand.

"Why do you wish to kill," asked Dr. Newman.

"Because I'm different. Wherever I go people stare and point at me like I'm a freak. They laugh, and make me hate myself, and them, too. I want to lash out and stop their grins and mockery."

"And how long have you felt this need?"

"From the first moment I was put on public display."

Dr. Newman reached for his pad and pen and lit a cigarette. He was enthralled by the robot's dilemma; his lunch was forgotten. He watched the mechanical hands clench and unclench along the edge of the couch, as the battery-directed mind within the mountainous creature sought to release its tensions.

"Who built you?"

"I evolved from the brain of Professor Otto Grumbach. He completed me in 1959. He built me, taught me and loved me as if I were his son." The mechanical monotone had softened, lost some of its strain. "The time with him was the happiest of my life. In his

laboratory I had a real home."

"And then?"

"Six months ago he died. His wife took over. She tried to understand me, but it wasn't the same. She had no patience to service my mechanisms or challenge my mind."

The robot paused for a recharge. Dr. Newman leaned forward, deeply involved, eager to catch every gesture and sound that emerged from this perplexed automaton before him.

"Two months ago Mrs. Grumbach came to the lab and told me the news I feared most of all. My upkeep was too great. To meet the expenses she was selling me to the Electrical Research Company of America. A week later I was part of a scientific exhibit touring the countryside."

Again the robot's voice faltered, his whole frame seemed to quiver with emotional pain.

"Go on," coaxed Dr. Newman encouragingly. "Better to get it all out at once."

"How would you know?"

"You'd be surprised at the kinship that exists between the mechanical and the living. Just as you yearn to be alive, there are hundreds of thousands of humans who act out their lives as if they were robots; controlled, stifled, thinking only what they're told to

think, seeing only what they're told to see; conforming by rote to a lifeless pattern, all the days of their lives."

"It's not the same," barked the robot, waving the gun menacingly again. "You don't know what it's like to be on display, to have people gape at you hour after hour, to hear their snickering laughs and sarcastic whispers. It's horrible. Suddenly I'm an oddity, a mechanical toy, a steel-riveted body with a brain that runs on batteries and tubes. I don't belong. The world's for flesh and blood people, there's no place for me anywhere. That's why I hate them, why I want to kill, because they have what I can never have, the quality of being human, of knowing I belong and am a part of this civilization. Please, Doctor, make me into a human being."

"I can't perform miracles," said Dr. Newman, gently, sadly.

"But there's nothing to live for," groaned the robot. "If I don't kill one of them, I'll kill myself rather than face their contemptuous laughter again. I can't stand being different."

Dr. Newman put out his cigarette. "It may not be as bad as you think."

The steel dome ceased twitching for a moment. Microscope lenses focused on him again suspiciously.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I said. Look at the positive side. You're immune to sickness, old age, pain . . ."

"You think what I just told you isn't painful?"

"I'm sure it is," continued the Doctor. "But suffering can't change you into a human being. You are what you are, steel, batteries and electrical impulses. You must accept it."

"I can't, damn you. Don't you understand? I want what human beings have. I want to be exactly like them."

Dr. Newman cleared his throat. Somehow it always came down to this: whether a patient was flesh-and-blood or metal-and-batteries he felt the same need to identify with a group. He gazed at the gun still pointing at him. How to find the right words?

He started slowly, speaking first of the progress of science, its benefits, its scope. He told how people always treated new advances with skepticism and ridicule until they received assurance that the invention or concept would be a boon to mankind, enriching, not impoverishing, their lives. He prophesied that as soon as the robot proved his worth to enough people, there would be demands for more of his kind; perhaps even female robots would be the next step, and the

future years would find colonies of humans and robots living side by side. There was much to live for in the era ahead, and being different might be the most valuable asset anyone could possess. A robot could live by his own rules, conform to his own standards and be the progenitor of a whole new civilization. In fact, as automation was becoming more and more a part of the contemporary human scene, the robot might eventually come to look upon people with contempt and do everything in his power to escape the humdrum sameness of their controlled existence.

When Dr. Newman finished, the robot remained speechless a long while. Finally, the grating voice spoke again. "I'm not too badly off, am I?"

"No, you're not," replied the Doctor.

"And here I've wasted all this time hating and envying peoples' lives, when I should have been doing something constructive with my own."

The robot looked down at the gun still in his hand. A grimace seemed to pass across his dome. "What a fool I've been. Everything that's happened to me can help the other robots still to come."

"Precisely."

The robot stretched joyously, as

if realizing for the first time the fullness of his existence. Laughing vibrations clicked up from his batteries; he positively hummed. "There's so much to do," he said, "a new generation to prepare for."

"Get out and let people see you as you really are," the Doctor urged. "Win over the cynics. Remember, you have nothing to be ashamed of. Exploit your differences, make mankind respect them. You have the choice; the benefits of this civilization are not so much conferred as won; your destiny is up to you."

The robot sprang up from the couch. There was a new vitality to his movements, even the surface of his metal physiognomy seemed to generate a glowing, sudden warmth. "It's amazing; I don't hate any more. I couldn't kill a fly. What did you do to me?"

"It's what you did to yourself," contradicted Dr. Newman. "You've come to terms with your uniqueness, accepted your special attributes. It wasn't very hard, was it?" He leaned back, smiled wearily and lit another cigarette.

The robot studied him with deep veneration. "To think I was going to kill you. Now I can't thank you enough. What can I do to show my gratitude? No price is too great."

"Remember, this has also been a

very stimulating session for me.”

Dr. Newman arose and walked with his patient to the door. The robot took his hand.

“You’re a great man, a great man. You’ve lifted a heavy load from my back. I hope you’ll let me come again.”

Dr. Newman smiled and said, “Anytime.”

The metal fingers released their grip and the mechanical man began his lumbering journey down the hall, the sound of his footsteps echoing through the corridor. Then a door closed and there was silence.

The Doctor walked back across his office. He saw the gun lying on the couch where the robot had left it. He picked it up, and inspected the cylinder; its chambers were full. He clicked off the safety and continued to hold the gun as he thought about the robot, and why he had not let the creature kill him. After all, was there a real purpose or meaning to life, for were not the words he spoke to the robot the same automatic reassurances he gave to his other patients?

After a moment he put the weapon down, and walked to the window. Outside, sunlight glist-

ened and trees rustled against the wind. And indefinable peace touched him. He had helped another tortured soul. This was what he had studied and trained for all those long, tiring years. It had happened before, but never with his life at stake, never had it given him such a sense of accomplishment.

Below, the figure of the robot emerged from the building. The steel frame hesitated for a moment in the shadows, then as if electrified by an inner thought it started confidently up the street. Passers-by stopped to stare at the strange phenomenon, but the robot continued on, head high, steel body erect and glistening; then he turned a corner and was gone.

Dr. Newman yawned, opened a drawer and shoved the robot’s gun beneath some papers. As long as there were creatures who still believed his words, he might as well continue to reel them off. Near the papers he saw a small key and picked it up. He opened the round, steel slot at the back of his neck, inserted the key, and, continuing to think about the masterful way he had conducted the last session, began winding himself up for his next patient.

★ Special Award Winner

THE IDEA had come to him suddenly, and he had been fascinated by it. At the time, it had been a ridiculous daydream—but the more he thought about it, the more sensible and imperative it became.

Early in the morning, he sat in the living room staring at the wall as was his custom. He would rise every day with the sun, make breakfast for Elsie and himself, and then sit lost in thought.

This practice of early morning meditation was a brief, daily escape from reality. For Elsie never came into the living room; she hadn't come in once in the last ten years of their married life.

She sat in a wheel chair in her bedroom. She sat silently, bitterly. Her silence was broken only when she was shrieking at him, complaining about this or that. When she wasn't upbraiding him, she

habitually stared at him with contempt, reminding him that he was responsible for her condition.

For ten long years she had been impossible to live with, and so each morning Rutherford Parnell, to lessen the pain, slipped into his own peculiar euphoria.

"Rutherford!"

"Yes—yes—" Roughly her voice had jerked him back to the living room. "Yes, yes, Elsie?"

"Well, come in here, *please!*" she shouted.

He arose with a vast weariness and walked into her room. It was dark (she never allowed him to raise the shades) and smelled faintly musty.

"This tea is weak!" she said, her voice a thin high-pitched squeal. "Weak, like you! Everything you try to do is weak, or cold or useless. But you don't have the decency to hire someone who can cook, do you?"

"Mrs. Casey will be over, as usual," Rutherford said, calmly. Mrs. Casey was the eighth in a line of women he had hired to be a companion for Elsie. "She can't

Our hero, Rutherford Parnell, is a first-rate introvert. When others, for example, are busily killing someone, he is engaged instead in the Victorian pleasures of thought and fancy. He conjures up a worthy enemy, imagines a deadly aim and then thinks up beautiful condolences.

FINAL ARRANGEMENTS

by

Lawrence Page

be here to cook breakfast, you know."

"I know. And a sloppy breakfast *you* make. Leave me alone, now, Rutherford. Unless you'd like to take me for a drive!"

How many times in the past decade had he heard that statement: *Unless you'd like to take me for a drive!*

He closed the door and walked into the living room, stopping to look out the window. He saw Mrs. Casey coming up the front walk.

Mrs. Casey was a warm, kindly woman, and Rutherford enjoyed talking to her. The dead-weight of Elsie's personality had not thus far affected her manner.

He opened the front door. "Good morning, Mrs. Casey," he said.

She was thin and tall, with a smiling Irish face. But her Irish face wasn't smiling today. "Good morning, sir," she said. "I was wonderin' if I could talk to you, Mr. Parnell."

"Surely," Rutherford said, and felt ill at ease.

"Mr. Parnell," she said as she came into the house, "I'm afraid, sir, that I'll have to give notice. I've found a position that pays a good deal more money . . ."

"I understand, Mrs. Casey, I understand. You will be able to finish out the week, won't you?"

"Oh, surely, sir."

Rutherford would have liked to have said, "It's really not more money that you want. You're leaving because you can't stand her. Isn't that the truth?" But he said nothing. Instead, he put on his hat and coat and walked out of the house.

It was a clear, sunny day. It was also the day Rutherford had picked to carry through the plan upon which he meditated morning after morning. He came to a halt at the bus stop on the corner and waited for Number 16, Downtown, as he had every weekday morning for ten years. He had sold the car, after the accident. But that hadn't removed the car or the accident from his thoughts. And Elsie never let him forget that he had been at the wheel that drizzling November night, and that it had been his error in judgment that had sentenced her to life in a wheel chair.

As he stepped into the bus, he nodded to the driver as he did every day; then he moved to the rear and took a seat by the window, as he did every day. But today, he left the bus three blocks before his regular stop.

A telephone booth stood nearby, just off the wide cement apron of a service station. He went into the booth and called his office.

"Mary?" he said. "Hello; Mary. This is Rutherford."

"Why, Rutherford—aren't you feeling well?"

"No, I'm not. That's why I called."

"You want me to tell Mr. Speaks you won't be in today? Oh, I do hope you feel better. It's not at all like you, Rutherford. Being out for a day, I mean . . ."

The senior Krushman of Krushman and Sons, Funeral Home, adjusted the spectacles on the thin bridge of his nose. He cleared his throat, ever so gently; his smile, intended to express sympathy, suggested a slight nausea.

"May I be of help, sir?"

"I would be grateful," Rutherford said, very softly, very carefully, "if you handled all the details for me."

"Of course, of course," Krushman said. "I understand. I know this is a most trying time for you. May I please have the name of the departed one?"

"That won't be necessary," Rutherford said. "I've written the address on this slip of paper. And if you would come by this evening and—and—take the deceased."

Krushman cleared his throat, but not quite as gently this time. "It's a little irregular, I must say.

And from whom, sir, will I get the necessary information?"

"When you arrive—you'll get it then. Eight o'clock tonight. Would that be all right?"

"Eight o'clock—yes, of course," Krushman said. "Now what type of funeral were you interested in?"

"The—the—"

"Departed one," Krushman put in helpfully.

"Yes," Rutherford said. "Yes, the departed one won't have many friends attending, I'm afraid."

Mrs. Casey expressed surprise that Rutherford had come home so early.

Rutherford smiled at her. "Take the rest of the day off, Mrs. Casey. I want you to get home early, too. In fact," he produced a wallet, "I'll pay you off now *and* with a little bonus."

Mrs. Casey's Irish face was somber. "I hope I didn't offend you this morning, Mr. Parnell. You do know why I'm leaving, don't you? I told an untruth this morning, that I did. It's not—"

"I know why you're leaving. It's my wife you can't stand. And I certainly understand how you feel? Oh, I don't blame you one bit, Mrs. Casey, not one bit."

Mrs. Casey fidgeted in embarrassment.

"I hate her, too. I wish she'd die, so I could be free. But she won't die. That would be a courtesy to me that's beyond her. If I could only walk away from her as easily as you can, Mrs. Casey."

Mrs. Casey, at this point, mumbled a quick good-bye, and her departure was clearly an escape.

"Rutherford! Rutherford, is that you?"

The voice from the bedroom was sharp, piercing, inescapable.

"Yes, dear" he said. "And I'm coming."

He took a moment to clench his fists, to steel himself, and then he strode into the bedroom. He went immediately to the windows, yanked up both shades. Sunlight filled the room.

"Rutherford!" she screamed. "Have you gone out of your mind!"

Rutherford took the poison he'd purchased at the drug store from his pocket, extended the package toward her. "I brought something for you," he said. "A little present. Something to help you escape your constant loneliness and bitterness."

"What are you saying? Pull those blinds down. You know I can't stand bright daylight at this hour, Rutherford! Has your incompetence gotten you fired now?"

"Angel," Rutherford said. "Did

I ever tell you that you're beautiful? Because if I did, I was a liar and I want you to know about it!"

"You're insane!" she shrieked.

He moved out of the bedroom quickly and into the small kitchen, where he poured a large glass of milk. He was all too aware of her voice going on endlessly in the other room, and it spurred him on. He opened the package and, with a teaspoon, dropped two helpings of the rat poison into the milk.

Then, glass in hand, he strode back into her room.

"Don't try to make up to me, Rutherford, I hate milk and you know it!"

"But you drink it every night," he said. "And besides, I'm not trying to make up to you. I haven't been able to make up to you in ten years!"

She burst into tears and put her head in her hands. The wheel chair creaked with her sudden movement. "You're horrible! Mother told me not to marry you! I should have listened to mother."

"Your mother never told you not to marry anybody. As soon as she saw a chance to get rid of you, she reeled me in like a prize catch. Even your father couldn't stand you!"

"Rutherford! You are horrible! Horrible!"

"Don't you want to hear the news, Elsie, about the present I bought you? Freedom. An escape for both of us. A chance to get away from each other!" He snickered. "After all, this present cost me over three thousand dollars!"

"Three thousand dollars! Where—where—"

"I cashed in my insurance, Elsie, dear. All the value of it. Three thousand, five hundred dollars and eighty-two cents. And I cancelled the term insurance. What about that!"

"Rutherford! You have gone out of your mind!"

"Just listen to me, will you? I've a proposition for you." He held the glass of milk steady, held it with both hands. "How would you like to go away to a rest home?"

"Don't be absurd," she said. "Is that your proposition?"

"That's what I thought you'd say."

He smiled—a gentle, sad smile—lifted the glass and drained it in one gulp. "You'll soon realize, Elsie dear, that things here weren't so rough for you . . ."

She didn't know what he meant—for a few minutes.

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LOVING

AND

DEADLY

by Michael Zuroy

THE OLD MAN looked at his children. There were five of them. The youngest was forty-five years old, and the oldest nearing sixty. Together with their spouses, they were crowded into the living room of his small, poorly furnished apartment.

The old man was ninety-five years old. His face had been fined down by time to its skeletal structure; his skin was dead white where it wasn't blotched with yellow; his eyes were narrow, elongated slits in a tangle of wrinkles.

He was thinking clearly today. Sometimes, his thinking was blurred, and he realized it; sometimes, past and present merged into one, so that he hardly knew where he was. But today things were sharp and clear in his mind. He knew exactly what he was doing.

There were ten other people in the room. He went to the kitchen and put on the tremendous kettle that his wife had cherished when she was alive. It was hard at times to recall Lisa's face. It was a good thirty years ago that she had passed away.

Old man Thebber limped back to the other room, the room where he spent most of his days now, and announced in his shaky voice, "Tea will be ready soon."

He scanned the faces turned to-

wards him. Most of them bore a thinly disguised suffering look as though they were weary of this ritual of tea, which he insisted upon preparing and serving himself, refusing all help.

"Reason I called you all here this evening," said the old man, "is to talk about my insurance policy."

The room grew quickly silent. Surprise and skeptical interest was apparent on all ten faces.

"What insurance policy?" asked Wilbur, a thickset, balding man in his fifties.

The old man began to cackle. Patiently, the group waited until he was done. "Didn't know I had one, did you?" wheezed old Thebber. "Well, I have. Fifty thousand dollars worth."

They looked at each other, stunned. Then the oldest son, Freddy, worked his long, petulant mouth and muttered, "Old man's dreaming again."

"I heard that!" snapped old Thebber. "I ain't dreaming. I got a policy, all right."

"No, you haven't," whipped back Freddy. "You're letting time

get away from you, Dad. But I remember a little better than you. You used to carry some pretty heavy insurance, I know. But when you made that bad investment, against all advice, many years back, and lost all your money, your insurance went, too."

"That's correct," said Alger, the next oldest son. "You might have considered us then. It's too late now."

"Yes," said his wife. She had a sagging face and hair that her beautician had tinted a dark orange. "Instead of us supporting you all these years without hope of getting paid back."

The old man's skin blotches grew darker with excitement. "I tell you I still got a policy!" he yelled.

"All right, Dad," said Wilbur. "All right. Don't get excited. Just explain to us how you could manage to pay the premiums on a fifty thousand dollar policy when you don't have a penny. Your old policies were nowhere near paid up, as I remember."

"I'll tell you," said the old man.

Children, like puppy dogs, will always be perennial favorites. I know of one child who enjoyed nothing more than putting fresh eggs on the floor and striking them decisive blows with a hammer. The children in our sentimental excursion are older and would therefore regard smashing the mere inanimate as kid stuff.

"I didn't pay any premiums. I didn't have to. Any of you smart youngsters ever hear of extended term insurance?"

A hardly perceptible excitement stirred in Wilbur's eyes.

"Just read your own policies," went on old Thebber. "Most policies have an extended term or premium non-payment clause. This means that even if you stop paying premiums, the insurance still runs. How long depends on how much you've already paid into the policy. Well, I managed to settle my debts without cashing in this policy, and I had enough in it so it ran a long time. It expires tonight, at midnight."

The old man's offspring and their wives and husbands stared at each other, trying to digest this idea. One by one, their voices broke out in an excited and accusing babble. After awhile, the piercing voice of Emily, one of the daughters, predominated. She was a narrow woman, with a narrow beaked face.

"If this is true," she said, "why did you wait so long to tell us?"

Old Thebber cackled again. "A man's got to have some secrets. Figured to have died long ago. Figured this would be a nice surprise when I went. But here I am, still breathing, and the policy's only got a few hours to run."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Emily.

"No? Well, damn it, I'll show you." The old man hobbled over to an ancient cabinet, rummaged amidst a pile of yellowed papers and came up with a folder. His trembling hand dropped the folder on the table that occupied the center of the room. "There you are. The policy and the papers to go with it."

Many hands reached for the policy. It was Wilbur who got it. He scanned it rapidly while the rest crowded around, trying to read over his shoulder. "Well," said Wilbur finally, "I guess you're right, Dad."

"Sure," said Alger dully. "But what's the good of it? The policy's practically expired."

"I should think, Father," said Freddy's wife acidly, "you might have continued to keep this to yourself. Why tease us?"

"I ain't teasing you," said the old man. "Any reason why I can't die before midnight tonight?"

"Father!" shrieked Emily.

"I mean it," said the old man. "I've lived long enough. I'm ninety-five. How much time have I got left, anyhow? Why, I can go just like that." He made a feeble attempt at snapping his fingers. "Suppose I died tomorrow? It'd just mean the insurance company

would keep the money instead of the family getting it. *Then* wouldn't you all gnash your teeth!"

"Just what are you suggesting, Dad?" asked Wilbur.

"Suggesting you do away with your old man tonight. Make it look accidental. There's a double indemnity clause in case of accidental death. That's a hundred thousand dollars, twenty thousand for each of you five children. You'd be crazy to pass it up."

There was a chorus of protests. The old man stood swaying, holding on to the table, smiling to himself until the bedlam died down. He was watching their faces, recognizing secret looks and desires in the children he knew so well.

"Look here," he said. "I'm talking sense. Just think about it."

"You're out of your mind, Dad," squawked Alger. "We can't murder our own father. We don't want to hear another word about it."

But the old man noticed that a waiting silence followed Alger's remark, a silence that gave him a chance to advance his arguments. He talked on. The protests grew weaker. The members of the family began casting sly, questioning glances at each other.

The old man said, "Now, let's call a spade a spade. You ain't got any real fondness for me. I'm just a nuisance to you. Wouldn't you

be better off having me out of the way, and the money to boot? I know that you've hated taking care of me. This is my chance to make it up to you."

Again there was a protesting clamor.

Finally, Freddy's voice broke through. "Don't talk that way, Dad. We haven't minded. Not at all. You brought us into the world and raised us, didn't you? We owe you something, I guess. No, if we were to consider your idea at all—and I, for one, don't take it seriously—it wouldn't be because we want to get rid of you."

Thebber's other daughter, Elizabeth, who up to now had not spoken, said dryly, "Since you feel that way, I don't see any point in continuing this discussion."

Taken aback, the others eyed her in uneasy silence. She was a fussy-looking little woman with graying hair, a tight mouth and eyes like drill points behind her glasses. She said, into the silence, "How can we sit here listening to a poor old man offering to sacrifice himself? Let's drop it at once."

"Gives me the shudders," agreed her mild-looking husband.

Freddy turned a weak smile towards her. "Just talk, Lizzy. No harm in talk."

"No," echoed Alger, "no harm."

"As I was saying," continued

Freddy, "if we considered your idea, Dad, it would only be from the practical standpoint. The dollars and cents standpoint, you might say."

"Exactly," said Emily. "Dollars and cents."

"A hundred thousand dollars," said Freddy's wife. "Who needs it more, us or the insurance company?"

"Insurance companies," stated Freddy, "are overloaded with money."

"Fabulous assets," rasped Emily's husband.

"They keep grabbing money," said Alger's wife. "Always grabbing money. Look at the money they've gotten from Dad."

"Seems a shame to let them get away with this," said Alger.

"A family ought to stand together against them," said Wilbur.

"Of course," said Freddy, "it wouldn't actually be murder . . ." His voice trailed away.

The key word had finally been said: They each pondered it, coming to terms with it.

"Well, let's be reasonable," said Wilbur. "Dad wants it this way, and, as he pointed out, how much longer can he live anyway? I mean, let's face it. We all want him to live on, but frankly, I wouldn't bet on him being alive next week. Suppose he dropped dead five min-

utes after midnight? The insurance company would really have the laugh on us."

"Exactly," said Freddy. He looked around quickly, finding the answer he sought on most of the faces. He wet his lips and addressed his father, not meeting the old man's eyes. "For the sake of discussion, Dad, suppose we agreed. How would you suggest we go about this—this thing?"

"That's for you to figure out," the old man snapped. "I'm giving you the opportunity. You take care of the rest."

"Why would *we* have to do it? Couldn't you . . ." began Emily.

"Nope." The old man shook his head. "I draw the line at doing away with myself. Couldn't go through with it. Besides, there's no double indemnity for suicide, and the company might prove that's what it was. Got to have accidental death."

"You're not giving us much time," complained Wilbur. "If you'd told us a few weeks ago, given us a chance to prepare . . ."

"I don't know what happens to time," said the old man. "I was going to tell you before, but I get mixed up and time slides away from me."

"Of course, Dad, of course," said Freddy briskly. "Never mind that. It's not too late—that is, if we were

actually going to do it." He gave a short, nervous laugh. "Suggestions?"

"Gas?" suggested Alger's wife promptly, patting her orange hair.

Freddy shook his head. "Could be interpreted as suicide. He'd have to be alone. Besides, there's danger of an explosion. We don't want to kill anyone else in the building."

"Electrocution, then," said Wilbur. "In the bathtub. It works; I've read about it. Let him touch some source of electricity while he's sitting in water."

"Weak," pronounced Freddy. "He won't do it alone, and why would he be taking a bath while we're visiting him? And it's not infallible. Suppose it doesn't kill him? Might leave us with an invalid on our hands."

"It kills them, all right," said Wilbur stubbornly. "I read about it. And at his age . . ."

"Well, we'll consider it," said Freddy. "Anything else?"

"My God," cried Elizabeth, "am I actually hearing this? All of you actually planning in cold blood to kill Dad?" She turned towards the old man, the lines of her face softening. "Make them stop, Daddy. I don't want you to die."

The old man, who was still standing, leaning on the table, intently watching his children, said, "Leave 'em be, Elizabeth. Leave

'em be. Don't try to interfere."

There was a long, uncomfortable silence.

It was Emily who broke it. "All right," she said, "how about hitting him on the head with some heavy object? After he's dead, we throw him down the stairs, making it look as though he fell."

"Impractical," said Freddy. "The police might investigate that. We need something that can't be proven anything but an accident. But I think you're on the right track. A fall would be the way."

"I agree with you, dear," said his wife. "I'd like to point out that this apartment is on the sixth floor."

"That's it!" exclaimed Alger. "An open window . . ."

"No, a closed window," said Wilbur. "Let him go through the glass. We can throw him. That way it'll look more like an accident."

"Good!" said Emily's husband in his rasping voice. "Something slippery on the floor in front of the kitchen window would explain it."

Everybody looked at Freddy.

He nodded slowly. "I like that way. I'm for it, unless there are any other ideas."

There were no other ideas.

Freddy looked at the old man, who was still clutching the table, peering from face to face. "All

right with you, Dad? I mean . . . ah . . . the method?"

"Good as any," said the old man.

Freddy's wolfish face broke up in a sly smile. "Of couse, if you don't want to . . ."

"I want to," said old Thebber. "And you want to . . ."

"Very well." Freddy looked around. "Now . . . who's to do it?"

The group looked at each other. The unpleasant fact hit them that the time for action was approaching. They must have visualized the frail body of the old man, a pathetic bundle of skin and bones, being swung to and fro, to and fro, finally being hurled through the window. There would be the sound of breaking glass . . . and perhaps he would scream on the way down.

"It will take two," said Freddy. "Women are not excused. He hardly weighs anything."

"Why, I thought," protested Emily, "that you and perhaps Wilbur . . ."

"No, you don't!" said Wilbur. "Don't make me the patsy."

"Well, don't look at me," said Alger.

Alger's wife said, "Freddy and his wife thought up this way of doing it. I should think that they . . ."

Freddy raised his hand. "Obviously, nobody wants the job. We'll have to draw lots."

They all glanced at each other and reluctantly nodded.

"Remember," Freddy said, "regardless of who does it, it's important that we all stand together and stick by our story. They can't shake the testimony of so many witnesses, even if they're suspicious. Agreed?"

Elizabeth's gloved hand slammed down on the table. "I won't have it!"

"For shame!" said Elizabeth. Her eyes swept around the room accusing each of them in turn. "I will not be a party to murdering my own father."

"It wouldn't be murder," said Freddy. "It's what Dad wants."

"It's still murder."

"But the money . . ."

"Forget about the money."

"In your circumstances, dear Elizabeth," said Alger's wife sourly, "you should be the last one to turn your nose up at money."

"Now, Liz, why don't you be reasonable?" said Wilbur. "Man's allotted years are three score and ten. How many men reach even that age? Let alone ninety-five? Dad's lived a good, full life. Let him go now."

"You always spoil things, Elizabeth," said Emily bitterly.

"All we ask is that you keep your mouth shut," said Alger. "You wouldn't send your whole family to the chair, would you? I don't think so."

"Now listen, daughter," said the old man. "Ain't no reason why you should object. Suppose I did linger on for awhile? I'd probably become sick and helpless; a nuisance and an expense."

"I don't care," said Elizabeth. "If that happened, I would take care of you. I'd come and nurse you."

The old man peered at her.

"You'll go when your time comes," went on Elizabeth, "and not before. Not one hour before. Not one minute before."

"Now, see here, Liz," blustered Wilbur. "If you . . ."

"Don't argue." The old man raised a shaking hand. They all looked at him. "I don't want any arguing. Calm down. I'll bring out the tea, and we'll sit around the table peaceably and try to persuade Elizabeth. There's time left."

There were a few muffled groans. The tea ritual was starting again. It could not be hurried; the old man never accepted help. Here, he was the host. He clung to this last shred of importance. Shaky and feeble though he was, he would busy himself about the kitchen, preparing the tea, filling a

platter with crackers, usually soggy with age, plastering jam on a couple of ancient saucers. He would load the whole business onto a teacart. The cart had a wheel that was off-round, and so it would have to be guided slowly and carefully into the other room. It would wobble as it progressed, and some of the tea would invariably slop over, filling the room with its over-brewed smell.

As if this did not take long enough, when the squeaking cart finally came to a halt, the old man would serve each guest personally, his trembling hands stubbornly bearing the cup and saucer to the table. More tea would slop over in the process. After this, they would wait until he tottered to his seat and painfully lowered himself into it. They could then drink the tea.

They sat stiffly around the table, waiting, studiously avoiding the subject that occupied their minds, but aware that midnight was growing closer every minute. After a long period of awkward attempts at conversation, the squeaking of the cart heralded their father's approach. The rest of the ritual took place in its crawling, predetermined order. And then the old man sat down.

They drank the tea hurriedly, finding it bitter and unpalatable as

usual. If they didn't finish the tea, they knew that the old man would harry them about not liking it; from experience, they knew that it was best to drink it down.

When they were done, old Thebber put his cup to his own lips, clamping his mouth on the coarse crockery so he wouldn't dribble. He drank all his tea and then put down the cup. His eyes took on a gleam. A new energy seemed to have entered him with the drink. He drew himself erect in his chair, and seemed to grow and widen. Before their watching eyes he took on a semblance of the powerful man he had once been, of the father they had feared when they were young.

"Well, children," he said, "so you'd do away with your old father, would you?" His voice was firm and strong, no longer an old man's quaver.

They stared at him, puzzled.

He chortled. "I always was a mean man," he said. "And I always knew that my children took after me. But not until tonight did I find out they're meaner than I ever was. Mean enough to murder their dad for money."

"But it was your idea!" squawked Alger.

"Sure, and you jumped at it. All except Elizabeth and her husband. I guess Elizabeth is the only one

who takes after her ma. She was a good woman, your ma was."

"What are you trying to tell us, Dad?" asked Freddy belligerently.

"That I'm dying and I'm taking you with me. Except for Elizabeth and her husband. I didn't put any poison in their tea."

Emily let out a shriek.

Wilbur roared, "That's what I call a poor joke."

Then there was a dead silence.

"No joke," said the old man, "as you'll quickly find out. I left a note for the police explaining and proving that I'm responsible for this. Elizabeth will collect the insurance money. Even if she don't get double indemnity, she'll do all right."

Elizabeth's hands had gone to her cheeks, and her middle-aged face seemed to crumble like a little girl's. "Oh, no," she whispered, "oh, no. You didn't, Daddy. I don't want the money. I want you alive. I want everybody alive."

The old man looked at her, and a gentle smile moved his puckered mouth. "Just like your ma," he said. "Just like my Lisa."

In the stricken silence, each of them, frantically concerned with their own sensations, sat waiting for the onslaught of pain.

Wilbur was the first to feel it. His hands clutched his middle, and his face took on an agonized grimace. "Dad!" he cried, as though

he were a small boy calling for help, hoping his father could make things right again.

The pain began twisting the old man's face, but he kept his head up-

right. He looked around at the frightened faces. "It's all right, children," he said gently, almost tenderly. "Just come along now. Come with me."



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by Avram Davidson

CLEM GOODHUE met the train with his taxi. If old Mrs. Merriman were aboard he would be sure of at least one passenger. Furthermore, old Mrs. Merriman had somehow gotten the idea that the minimum fare was a dollar. It was really seventy-five cents, but Clem had never been able to see a reason for telling her that. However, she was not aboard that morning. Sam Wells was. He was coming back from the city—been to put in a claim to have his pension increased—but Sam Wells wouldn't pay five cents to ride any distance

THE

COST OF



School children are taught that saving money is a virtue and they are also taught that love of money is the root of all evil. It is this sort of ambivalence which turns a rising generation straight into the solacing arms of rock and roll.



under five miles. Clem disregarded him.

After old Sam a thin, brown-haired kid got off the train. Next came a girl, also thin and also brown-haired, who Clem thought was maybe the kid's teenage sister. Actually, it was the kid's mother.

After *that* came Kent Castwell.

Clem had seen him before, early in the summer. Strangers were not numerous in Ashby, particularly strangers who got ugly and caused commotions in bars. So Clem wouldn't forget him in a hurry. Big, husky fellow. Always seemed to be sneering at something. But the girl and the kid hadn't been with him then.

"Taxi?" Clem called.

Castwell ignored him, began to take down luggage from the train. But the young girl holding the kid by the hand turned and said, "Yes—just a minute."

"Where to?" Clem asked, when the luggage was in the taxi.

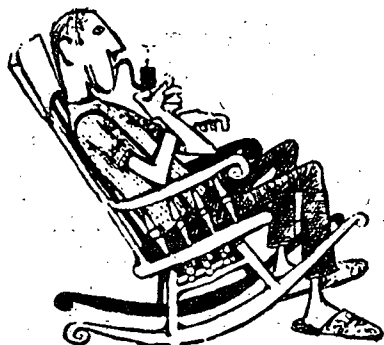
"The old Peabody place," the girl said. "You know where that is?"

"Yes. But nobody lives there any more."

"Somebody does now. Us." The big man swore as he fiddled with the handle of the right-hand door. It was tied with ropes. "Why don't you fix this thing or get a new one?"

"Costs money," Clem said. Then, "Peabody place? Have to charge you three dollars for that."

Kent Castwell



"Let's go dammit, let's go!"

After they'd started off, Castwell said, "I'm giving you two bucks. Probably twice what it's worth, anyway."

Half-turning his head, Clem protested. "I told you, mister, it was three."

"And I'm telling you, mister," Castwell mimicked the driver's New England accent, "that I'm giving you two."

Clem argued that the Peabody Place was far out. He mentioned the price of gas, the bad condition of the road, the wear on the tires. The big man yawned. Then he used a word which Clem rarely used himself, and never in the presence of women and children. But this young woman and child didn't seem to notice.

"Stop off at Nickerson's Real Estate Office," Castwell said.

Levi P. Nickerson, who was also the County Tax Assessor, said, "Mr. Castwell. I assume this is Mrs. Castwell?"

"If that's your assumption, go right ahead," said Kent. And laughed.

It wasn't a pleasant laugh. The woman smiled faintly, so L.P. Nickerson allowed himself an economical chuckle. Then he cleared his throat. City people had odd

ideas of what was funny. Meanwhile, though—

"Now, Mr. Castwell. About this place you're renting. I didn't realize—you didn't mention—that you had this little one, here."

Kent said, "What if I didn't mention it? It's my own business. I haven't got all day—"

Nickerson pointed out that the Peabody place stood all alone, isolated, with no other house for at least a mile and no other children in the neighborhood. Mrs. Castwell if, indeed, she *was*) said that this wouldn't matter much, because Kathie would be in school most of the day.

"School. Well, that's it, you see. The school bus, in the first place, will have to go three miles off what's been its regular route, to pick up your little girl. And that means the road will have to be plowed regular—snow gets real deep up in these parts, you know. Up till now, with nobody living in the old Peabody place, we never had to bother with the road. Now, this means," and he began to count off on his fingers, "first, it'll cost Ed Westlake, he drives the school bus, more than he figured on when he bid for the contract; second, it'll cost the County to keep your road open. That's besides the cost of the girl's schooling, which is third."

Kent Castwell said that was tough, wasn't it? "Let's have the keys, Nick," he said.

A flicker of distaste at the familiarity, crossed the real estate man's face. "You don't seem to realize that all this extra expense to the County isn't covered by the tax assessment on the Peabody place," he pointed out. "Now, it just so happens that there's a house right on the outskirts of town become available this week. Miss Sarah Beech passed on, and her sister, Miss Lavinia, moved in with their married sister, Mrs. Calvin Adams. 'Twon't cost *you* any more, and it would save *us* considerable."

Castwell, sneering, got up. "What! Me live where some old-maid landlady can be on my neck all the time about messing up her pretty things? Thanks a lot. No thanks." He held out his hand. "The keys, kid. Gimme the keys."

Mr. Nickerson gave him the keys. Afterwards he was to say, and to say often, that he wished he'd thrown them into Lake Amastanquit, instead.

The income of the Castwell menage was not large and consisted of a monthly check and a monthly money order. The check came on the fifteenth, from a city trust company, and was assumed

by some to be inherited income. Others argued in favor of its being a remittance paid by Castwell's family to keep him away. The money order was made out to Louise Cane, and signed by an army sergeant in Alaska. The young woman said this was alimony, and that Sergeant Burndall was her former husband. Tom Talley, at the grocery store, had her sign the endorsement twice, as Louise Cane and as Louise Castwell. Tom was a cautious man.

Castwell gave Louise a hard time, there was no doubt about that. If she so much as walked in between the sofa, on which he spent most of his time, and the television, he'd leap up and belt her. More than once both she and the kid had to run out of the house to get away from him. He wouldn't follow, as a rule, because he was barefooted, as a rule, and it was too much trouble to put his shoes on.

Lie on the sofa and drink beer and watch television all afternoon, and hitch into town and drink bar whiskey and watch television all evening—that was Kent Castwell's daily schedule. He got to know who drove along the road regularly, at what time, and in which direction, and he'd be there, waiting. There was more than one who could have dispensed with the

pleasure of his company, but he'd get out in the road and wave his arms and not move until the car he got in front of stopped.

What could you do about it? Put him in jail?

Sure you could.

He hadn't been living there a week before he got into a fight at the Ashby Bar.

"Disturbing the peace, using profane and abusive language, and resisting arrest—that will be ten dollars or ten days on each of the charges," said Judge Paltiel Bradford. "And count yourself lucky it's not more. Pay the Clerk."

But Castwell, his ugly leer in no way improved by the dirt and bruises on his face, said, "I'll take jail."

Judge Bradford's long jaw set, then loosened. "Look here, Mr. Castwell, that was just legal language on my part. The jail is closed up. Hasn't been anybody in there since July." It was then November. "It would have to be heated, and illuminated, and the water turned on, and a guard hired. To say nothing of feeding you. Now, I don't see why the County should be put to all that expense on your account. You pay the Clerk thirty dollars. You haven't got it on you, take till tomorrow. Well?"

"I'll take the jail."

"It's most inconvenient—"

"That's too bad, Your Honor."

The judge glared at him. Gamaliel Coolidge, the District Attorney, stood up. "Perhaps the Court would care to suspend sentence," he suggested. "Seeing it is the defendant's first offense."

The Court did care. But the next week Kent was back again, on the same charge. Altogether, the sentence now came to sixty dollars, or sixty days. And again Castwell chose jail.

"I don't generally do this," the judge said, fuming. "But I'll let you pay your fine off in installments. Considering you have a wife and child."

"Uh—uh. I'll take jail."

"You won't like the food!" warned His Honor.

Castwell said he guessed the food would be up to the legal requirements. If it wasn't, he said, the State Board of Prison Inspectors would hear about it.

Some pains were taken to see that the food served Kent during his stay in jail was beyond the legal requirements—if not much beyond. The last time the State Board had inspected the County Jail it had cost the tax-payers two hundred dollars in repairs. It was costing them quite enough to incarcerate Kent Castwell, as it was, although the judge had reduced the

cost by ordering the sentences to run concurrently.

All in all, Kent spent over a month in jail that winter, at various times. It seemed to some that whenever his money ran out he let the County support him, and let the woman and child fend for themselves. Tom Talley gave them a little credit at the store. Not much.

Ed Westlake, when he bid again for the school bus contract, added the cost of going three miles out of his way to pick up Kathie. The County had no choice but to meet the extra charge. It was considered very thoughtless of Louise to wait till *after* the contract was signed before leaving Castwell and going back to the city with her child. The side road to the Peabody place didn't have to be plowed so often, but it still had to be plowed *some*. That extra cost, just for one man! It was maddening.

It almost seemed—no, it *did* seem—as if Kent Castwell was deliberately setting himself in the face of New England respectability and thrift. The sacred words, “Eat it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without,” didn't mean a thing to him. He wasn't just indifferent. He was hostile.

Ashby was not a thriving place.

It had no industries. It was not a resort town, being far from sea and mountains alike, with only the shallow, muddy waters of Lake Amastanquit for a pleasure spot. Its thin-soiled farms and meagre woodlots produced a scanty return for the hard labor exacted. The young people continued to leave. Kent Castwell, unfortunately, showed no signs of leaving.

All things considered, it was not surprising that Ashby had no artists' colony. It *was* rather surprising, then, that Clem Goodhue, meeting the train with his taxi, recognized Bob Laurel at once as an artist. When asked afterwards how he had known, Clem looked smug, and said that he had once been to Provincetown.

The conversation, as Clem recalled it afterwards, began with Bob Laurel's asking where he could find a house which offered low rent, peace and quiet, and a place to paint.

“So I recommended Kent Castwell,” Clem said. He was talking to Sheriff Erastus Nickerson (Levi P.'s cousin) at the time.

“Peace and *quiet*?” the sheriff repeated. “I know Laurel's a city fellow, and an artist, but, still and all—”

They were seated in the bar of the Ashby House, drinking their weekly small glass of beer. “I

looked at it this way, Erastus," the taxi-man said. "Sure, there's empty houses all around that he could rent. Suppose *he*—this artist fellow—suppose *he* picks one off on a side road with nobody else living on it? Suppose *he* comes up with a wife out of somewhere, and suppose *she* has a school-age child?"

"You're right, Clem."

"'Course I'm right. Bad enough for the County to be put to all that cost for *one* house, let alone two."

"You're right, Clem. But will he stay with Castwell?"

Clem shrugged. "That I can't say. But I did my best."

Laurel stayed with Castwell. He really had no choice. The big man agreed to take him in as lodger and to give over the front room for a studio. And, holding out offers of insulating the house, putting in another window, and who knows what else, Kent Castwell persuaded the unwary artist to pay several months' rent in advance. Needless to say, he drank up the money and did nothing at all in the way of the promised improvements.

Neither District Attorney Gamaliel Coolidge nor Sheriff Nickerson, nor, for that matter, anyone else, showed Laurel much sympathy. He had grounds for a civil suit, they said; nothing else. It should be a lesson to him not to

throw his money around in the future, they said.

So the unhappy artist stayed on at the old Peabody place, buying his own food and cutting his own wood, and painting, painting, painting. And all the time he knew full well that his leering landlord only waited for him to go into town in order to help himself to both food and wood.

Laurel invited Clem to have a glass of beer with him more than once, just to have someone to tell his troubles to. Besides stealing his food and fuel, Kent Castwell, it seemed, played the TV at full blast when Laurel wanted to sleep; if it was too late for TV, he set the radio to roaring. At moments when the artist was intent on delicate brush-work, Castwell would decide to bring in stove-wood and drop it on the floor so that the whole house shook.

"He talks to himself in that loud, rough voice of his," Bob Laurel complained. "He has a filthy mouth. He makes fun of my painting. He—"

"I tell you what it is," Clem said. "Kent Castwell has no consideration for others. That's what it is. Yep."

Bets were taken in town, of a ten-cent cigar per bet, on how long Laurel would stand for it. Levi Nickerson, the County Tax Asses-

sor, thought he'd leave as soon as his rent was up. Clem's opinion was that he'd leave sooner. "Money don't mean that much to city people," he pointed out.

Clem won.

When he came into Nickerson's house, Levi, who was sitting close to the small fire in the kitchen stove, wordlessly handed over the cigar. Clem nodded, put it in his pocket. Mrs. Abby Nickerson sat next to her husband, wearing a man's sweater. It had belonged to her late father; whose heart had failed to survive the first re-election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and it still had a lot of wear left in it. Abby was unraveling old socks, and winding the wool into a ball. "Waste not, want not," was her motto—as well as that of every other old-time local resident.

On the stove a kettle steamed thinly. Two piles of used envelopes were on the table. They had all been addressed to the Tax Assessor's office of the County, and had been carefully opened so as not to mutilate them. While Clem watched, Levi Nickerson removed one of the envelopes from its place on top of the uncovered kettle. The mucilage on its flaps loosened by steam, it opened out easily to Nickerson's touch. He proceeded to refold it and then reseal it so that the used outside was now inside;

then he added it to the other pile.

"Saved the County eleven dollars, this way, last year," he observed. "Shouldn't wonder but what I don't make it twelve, this year, maybe twelve-fifty." Clem gave a small appreciative grunt. "Where is he?" the Tax Assessor asked.

"Laurel? In the Ashby Bar. He's all packed. I told him to stay put. I told them to keep an eye on him, phone me here if he made a move to leave."

He took a sheet of paper out of his pocket and put it on the table. Levi looked at it, but made no move to pick it up. To his wife he said, "I'm expecting Erastus and Gam Coolidge over, Mrs. Nickerson. County business. I expect you can find something to do in the front of the house while we talk."

Mrs. Levi nodded. Even words were not wasted.

A car drove up to the house.

"That's Erastus," said his cousin. "Gam should be along—he *is* along. Might've known he wouldn't waste gasoline; came with Erastus."

The two men came into the kitchen. Mrs. Abby Nickerson arose and departed.

"Hope we can get this over with before nightfall," the sheriff said. "I don't like to drive after dark if I can help it. One of my headlights

is getting dim, and they cost so darned much to replace."

Clem cleared his throat. "Well, here 'tis," he said, gesturing to the paper on the table. "Laurel's confession: 'Tell the sheriff and the D.A. that I'm ready to give myself up,'" he says. "'I wrote it all down here,'" he says. Happened about two o'clock this afternoon, I guess. Straw that broke the camel's back. Kent Castwell, he was acting up as usual. Stomping and swearing out there at the Peabody place. Words were exchanged. Laurel left to go out back," Clem said, delicately, not needing to further comment on the Peabody place's lack of indoor plumbing. "When he come back, Castwell had taken the biggest brush he could find and smeared paint over all the pictures Laurel had been working on. Ruined them completely."

There was a moment's silence. "Castwell had no call to do that," the sheriff said. "Destroying another man's property. They tell me some of those artists get as much as a hundred dollars for a painting . . . What'd he do then? Laurel, I mean."

"Picked up a piece of stovewood and hit him with it. Hit him hard."

"No doubt about his being dead, I suppose?" the sheriff asked.

Clem shook his head. "There was no blood or anything on the

wood," he added. "Just another piece of stove wood . . . But he's dead, all right."

After a moment Levi Nickerson said, "His wife will have to be notified. No reason why the County should have to pay burial expenses. Hmm. I expect she won't have any money, though. Best get in touch with those trustees who sent Castwell his money every month. *They'll* pay."

Gamaliel Coolidge asked if anyone else knew. Clem said no. Bob Laurel hadn't told anyone else. He didn't seem to want to talk.

This time there was a longer silence.

"Do you realize how much Kent Castwell cost this County, one way or the other?" Nickerson asked.

Clem said he supposed hundreds of dollars. "Hundreds and *hundreds* of dollars," Nickerson said.

"*And*," the Tax Assessor went on, "do you know what it will cost us to try this fellow—for murder in any degree or manslaughter?"

The District Attorney said it would cost thousands. "Thousands and *thousands* . . . and that's just the trial," he elaborated. "Suppose he's found guilty and appeals? We'd be obliged to fight the appeal. More thousands. And suppose he gets a new trial? We'd have it to pay all over again."

Levi P. Nickerson opened his mouth as though it hurt him to do so. "What it would do to the County tax-rate . . ." he groaned. "Kent Castwell," he said, his voice becoming crisp and definite, "is not worth it. He is just not *worth* it."

Clem took out the ten-cent cigar he'd won, sniffed it. "My opinion," he said, "it would have been much better if this fellow Laurel had just packed up and left. Anybody finding Castwell's body would assume he'd fallen and hit his head. But this confession, now—"

Sheriff Erastus Nickerson said reflectively, "I haven't read any confession. You, Gam? You, Levi? No. What you've told us, Clem, is just hearsay. Can't act on hearsay. Totally contrary to all principals of American law . . . Hmm. Mighty nice sunset." He arose and walked over to the window. His cousin followed him. So did District Attorney Coolidge. While they were looking at the sunset Clem Goodhue, after a single glance at their backs, took the sheet of paper from the kitchen table and thrust it into

the kitchen stove. There was a flare of light. It quickly died down. Clem carefully reached his hand into the stove, took out the small corner of the paper remaining, and lit his cigar with it.

The three men turned from the window.

Levi P. Nickerson was first to speak. "Can't ask any of you to stay to supper," he said. "Just a few left-overs, is all we're having. I expect you'll want to be going on your way."

The two other County officials nodded.

The taxi-man said, "I believe I'll stop by the Ashby bar. Might be someone there wanting to catch the evening train. Night, Levi. Don't turn on the yard light for us."

"Wasn't going to," said Levi. "Turning them on and off, that's what burns them out. Night Clem, Gam, Erastus." He closed the door after them. "Mrs. Nickerson," he called to his wife, "you can come and start supper now. We finished our business."



★
Special Award Winner

THE

Mrs. Emily Proctor had the nicest roses on Roxbury Avenue, and that was because she never allowed the gardener near them. Samuel, her husband, could—under careful direction—spade the earth at fertilizing time; but the hired Japanese was required to confine his activities to the small patch of front lawn and the hedges.

Mrs. Emily Proctor always tended the roses herself. There were many of them. The climbers started at the entrance to the driveway and extended the entire length of the white brick wall that stretched to the rear of the lot. The bushes were at the corners of the building, front and rear, and the rose trees were in the patio that filled in the L created by the architectural design of Roxbury Haven, a ten-unit

stucco, singles and doubles by lease only. Emily and Samuel Proctor resided in apartment 5A, the lower rear at the end of the patio where the small sign "Manager" was affixed to the door.

All of the lower apartments opened into the patio, and all of the upper apartments had small balconies with neat wrought iron railings in front of sliding glass doors. From the rose trees in the patio, and from the corner bushes at the entrance and at the approach to the garage area, and from the climbers on the wall, Mrs. Emily Proctor, attired in smock, gardening gloves and straw coolie hat, had visual command of every doorway, every garage stall, and every person who entered or left Roxbury Haven. There was nothing

AFFAIR UPSTAIRS

by Helen Nielsen

about any tenant that she didn't know.

Mrs. Emily Proctor was happy.

On the day Haynes versus Haynes made its initial appearance on Judge Carmichael's docket, Emily timed her activities carefully. She had been spraying the Mary Margaret McBride at the entrance to the driveway for nearly thirty minutes, when Tod Haynes returned. She saw the black convertible come slowly down the street—very slowly for Tod Haynes, who was usually fast about every-

thing. Fast, she mused darkly, in every way. The car was barely moving as it turned into the driveway, and his face, which she saw clearly before he saw her, was that of a man driving in his sleep—or one who had just been hit by a falling wall. And then a disturbing thing occurred. Tod Haynes saw Emily. He looked at her, glared at her; and then the convertible leaped forward, swerving slightly so as to force her back against the rose bush, and roared past on its way to the garage.

Our theme is of vast importance: curiosity may be of irreparable damage to cats as well as to non fur-bearing creatures. For proof, consider the result of those curious individuals in the dawn of history who wondered what would happen if they made gun-powder and then a gun, and put the former into the latter.

"Oh," Emily gasped. "That man!"

She didn't expect the Mary Margaret McBride to answer. The voice came as a surprise.

"Now, what's got into him? Is he drunk?"

"I wouldn't be surprised," Emily answered. "He drinks like a fish."

And then she remembered herself. Turning, she saw Mr. Kiley, the postman, who had just crossed the lawn and was arriving, mail in hand. Automatically, Emily reached up to brush back her hair and straighten the coolie hat.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Kiley," she said. Her voice softened. "Now, I shouldn't have said that about Mr. Haynes. He's been having so much trouble."

"Sickness?" Kiley asked.

"Worse trouble than that, I'm afraid. Poor Mr. Haynes was sued for divorce by Mrs. Haynes only this morning."

Mr. Kiley shook his head sadly.

"Moral deterioration," he said. "There's a new series running in the evening paper that tells all about it, Mrs. Proctor. Homes breaking up. Children running wild. Moral deterioration. Gonna wreck the whole country."

And Emily Proctor smiled knowingly.

"You don't have to tell me!" she declared. "If you managed an apart-

ment building, you wouldn't need to read the newspapers."

From where he stood, Mr. Kiley could see the row of balconies extending along the upper floor of the unit. Now, out of 4B, emerged Patti Parr—young, silver blonde, her lovely body still clad in a flimsy white negligée. She stretched luxuriously and stared up at the sky. Mr. Kiley watched appreciatively.

"I'll bet I wouldn't!" he said.

Emily glanced up at 4B, frowned and then reached for the mail in Mr. Kiley's hand. "Anything for me?" she asked brightly. "Oh, just another old bill! At least I can put the rest of it in the boxes for you."

"Lord knows, you're on your feet enough, Mr. Kiley! And I haven't another thing to do." By this time, Emily was nudging Mr. Kiley toward the sidewalk. "And I do hope you won't repeat anything I said about poor Mr. Haynes," she added. "If there's anything I can't stand, it's gossip."

Mr. Kiley moved on down the street, and Emily paused a moment to look after him. It was a lovely morning. The pre-school children were playing in the yards, and she wondered, idly, what these young mothers were thinking of to let their children leave such expensive toys scattered over

the neighborhood, and why Mrs. Williams didn't do something about her daughter. The Williams child ate constantly, and resembled a baby blimp.

When Emily turned back to the patio, she noted that Patti Parr had gone inside again. That was a relief. Her appearance had such bad timing. Tod Haynes would be returning from the garage at any moment. She went to the row of mail boxes and busied herself, listening without turning when the heavy footsteps came from the rear of the driveway. They came closer, and then stopped.

"Do you censor it for us, too?" Tod Haynes asked.

Emily, with most of the mail still in her hands, was trying pitifully to stuff old Miss Brady's *New Romances* into a mail slot designed for letters. When it dropped from her hands, Tod bent down quickly, retrieved it, and returned it to her. Her lips tried to form the words, "Thank you," but her voice didn't respond at all. Tod stared at her darkly and then stalked off toward the inside stairwell, leaving Emily Proctor with a peculiar feeling she would later recognize as the beginning of terror.

The marriage of Tod and Ann

Haynes had disturbed Emily from the beginning. She was certain it would never last. Tod Haynes wasn't the husband type.

"Do you mean he doesn't look beat enough?" Sam asked. "Give him time."

It wasn't at all what Emily meant. Tod Haynes had a roving eye—any woman could see that—and Ann Haynes was nobody's fool. She was attractive in a self-assured way that Emily secretly envied. A businesswoman who assumed responsibilities and would expect a mate to do the same. Oh, Emily didn't guess or deduce all this. When apartments are as close as the apartments at Roxbury Haven; and when one of the legitimate duties of the co-manager is to inspect the units when they are vacated for new occupancy; and when—as it developed—such a situation occurred shortly after the Haynes' moved into 5B, Emily couldn't avoid hearing one significant conversation which took place on the balcony one summer evening at dusk.

The magnolia tree Sam was always going to get trimmed grew up beside that balcony. Because of it, Emily, who was near the sliding doors inside 4B, heard when Tod and Ann stepped outside.

"Ouch!" Tod said. "So help me, someday I'll get an axe—"

Then Ann laughed softly, and there was one of those interesting silences when Emily's imagination made her feel slightly uncomfortable.

After a little while, Tod said, "No regrets, Mrs. Haynes?"

"No regrets," Ann answered. "What about you?"

"Oh, I'm getting used to the harness," Tod said. "I told you when I applied for the job—'experienced: no references.'"

"Tod—"

"—but a willingness to learn. Ann, this has to work."

"It will," Ann said.

"I mean, it *has* to. Life has to start making sense somewhere along the line."

By this time, Emily knew she was eavesdropping; but she always made herself believe that it was a part of her duty as manager to learn what kind of tenants she had. Credentials meant nothing. She could never see past anyone's teeth. And so she listened carefully as Tod Haynes continued.

"I blew it once," Tod said. "But I'm not going to blow it again. My luck changed the day I walked into Curtis's office and found you at the reception desk. Do you remember what you said to me?"

Ann's voice became professional.

"Mr. Curtis will see you in a

few minutes, Mr. Haynes."

"No," Tod said. "I mean that wonderful thing you told me just before I went in to see Curtis. You must have known my knees were shaking. 'Mr. Haynes,' you said, 'I want you to know I have a book in my library that's dog-eared and loved. It's called A SUMMER AGO.'"

Ann laughed softly.

"You would remember that!"

"A book that sold exactly 622 copies," Tod added. "The one good thing I did before I became a one-shot genius. Ann—" Now his voice became quietly tense. "—hang on tight. I'm going to deliver for Curtis. I'm going up there again."

The silence came again. Now Emily could smell the magnolias; she began to feel guilty. She started to draw away from the door, filing away in her mind all she knew about the new tenants in 5B; and then Ann spoke once more.

"Tod, you didn't marry me for that, did you?"

"What?"

"Because I won't be used. I love you too much to be just the woman you need until you're on top again."

"Don't be silly."

Inside the doorway of 4B, Emily heard and nodded knowingly. Her

instincts were always right. Tod Haynes wasn't the husband type.

The proof of Emily's forebodings came in due time. Each morning Ann Haynes went off to the office while her husband stayed at home, a situation Emily found deplorable.

"If he's got his wife trained to work for him, don't knock it," Sam said. But Sam didn't understand. It was dangerous to leave a man like Tod Haynes alone. He was too attractive, as was duly noted by every female in Roxbury Haven. There was Mrs. Abrams, in her late sixties, whose sole interest in Tod Haynes was because he reminded her of grandson Robert, stationed in Germany.

"With NATO," she told Tod, "very close to General Norstadt."

And Tod was so charming, Mrs. Abrams dropped a stitch on the sweater she was knitting for Robert, and Mr. Abrams raised his eyes from the *Wall Street Journal* for all of thirty seconds—more than anyone had seen of him in months.

There was Miss Fanny Brady, who had been a fixture in bit parts since the days of the crank and megaphone and would never retire. Fanny had a weakness for flame colored capris and pink bra tops, and her hair coloring varied from orange to silver. She had no

more than heard Tod's typewriter at work, than she attempted to interest him in doing the story of her life.

"It won't be dull," she promised. "I have memories."

"Only memories?" Tod teased. "I should think your future would be even more interesting."

Thereafter, Miss Fanny Brady glowed every time Tod walked across the patio, or appeared on his balcony for a cigarette and coffee break.

Emily missed none of these things. Long before apartment 4B was rented, she had learned to resent Tod Haynes. She never allowed herself the luxury—or the pain—of understanding why. She never considered, as she shared a dull breakfast with Sam, that it might really be Ann Haynes whom she resented. But one thing Emily knew, by means of that ancient art known as feminine intuition, and that was that trouble came to Roxbury Haven on the day Patti Parr rented 4B.

Usually, Emily showed the apartments. Sam confined his activities to the maintenance work in morning hours before going off to his part-time job. But on the morning Patti Parr's heels clicked smartly across the patio, and her determined finger rang the bell marked "Manager," Sam adjusted

his suspenders, donned the handsome Italian sweater (similar to one of Tod Haynes') Emily had given him, over protests that he wouldn't be found dead in it, and escorted Miss Parr upstairs. They were gone an inordinately long time. When Emily went up, ostensibly to see if the drapery rods were in working order, she found a merry threesome in the hall. Tod Haynes' door was open. He stood just outside chatting with Patti Parr as if they were old friends.

"I think the apartment is darling," she cried, as Emily approached, "but I wanted to see how it looked furnished. Mr. Haynes was on his balcony and heard me."

"Anything to be neighborly," Tod said. "What about it, Mrs. Proctor? Do I get a commission for renting the apartment?" And then he laughed. "Just joking. I get a new neighbor—that's commission enough."

When Patti Parr moved in, Tod Haynes was very helpful with the drapes. Emily doubted that Patti was the literary type, but he was also very helpful with the crates of books. On one occasion, when a special delivery package came for Patti, Emily took it up to 4B and found Tod in a strange situation. He was sprawled on the divan, a drink in one hand and a sheaf of typewritten paper in the other. He

looked up when he saw her at the door. Her disapproval must have showed. He frowned—then smiled crookedly.

"Patti," he said, "shall I read that chapter to Mrs. Proctor, the one that bugged me? I told you I wanted a woman's reaction."

Patti shook her head quickly. Emily wasn't supposed to see, but she did. It was some kind of signal between them. Emily didn't understand; but she wasn't surprised when—a few days later—she heard Tod and Ann quarreling bitterly in the garage.

"Tod, I warned you," Ann said. "I won't be used!"

And Tod's voice answered, "You're making a fuss over nothing. I just had a few drinks—"

"You know what drinking did to you once—"

Discretion forbade Emily hearing any more, but she was prepared for the big break when it came. It began with Tod selling his book. He came home driving a black convertible: second hand, but big. It roared magnificently down the driveway and into the garage. Moments later, Tod came striding across the patio. It was November. The rains would start any time now. Overhead, the sky was leaden. Emily began to gather up her gardening tools.

"Here, let me help you," Tod

said, taking up the bag of fertilizer. "Tell me, Mrs. Proctor, do you put little umbrellas over your plants when it rains, or do you leave them standing out in the cruel world?"

Emily was a bit startled, and then she realized that Tod had been drinking again. At her door, he added, "Now, don't worry about me. I'm going right upstairs like a good boy and call my wife; and then I'm going to take her to dinner, and dancing, and we may even take a rocket to the moon."

He bounded up the stairs, leaving Emily a little breathless.

But Tod Haynes didn't go out with his wife that night. He didn't go out at all for some time.

It was almost dusk when Patti Parr came downstairs and got her small foreign car out of the garage. Midway out of the driveway, the motor stalled. Emily heard Patti trying to start it again until, finally, Tod came down and tried to help. It was no use. By that time, the rain had started. Amid much laughing, Tod pushed the small car back into the garage and returned in his own. Emily saw Patti get in Tod's car and the two of them drive away.

At the usual time, Ann Haynes came home from work. Being a sensible woman, who read weather forecasts before going to work, she

was wearing her hooded raincoat. Emily watched her go upstairs. After that, Emily continued to watch the Haynes' window. She saw Ann come to the balcony several times. It rained harder. As the hours passed, Emily was tortured with indecision. Should she tell poor Mrs. Haynes her husband had gone out in his car after drinking? On a rainy night, there was even more chance he might crack up. With Sam off at work, there was no one to advise her. While Emily sat beside the telephone deliberating, it rang. She picked it up.

"Mrs. Proctor," Ann Haynes asked, somewhat timidly, "I wonder if you saw my husband go out any time this afternoon?"

"Why, yes," Emily answered. "You mustn't worry, dear. He went out in his car."

"His car?" Ann Haynes echoed.

"The car he drove home. He seemed quite happy over it. And then, a little later, that sweet Miss Page next door to you started to go out in her car, but it stalled. Your husband came down and took her—"

"Thank you!" Ann Haynes said, abruptly.

The sound of her receiver clicked in Emily's ear. She was uneasily aware, as she replaced the telephone on the cradle, that she

might have said too much. But she was also aware of a vague sense of vicarious pleasure.

On the following morning, Mrs. Haynes didn't go to work. In the middle of the morning, clear after the rain, so that all the patio regulars were in their places, Patti Parr returned in a cab. Two hours later, Tod Haynes' black convertible roared up the drive. Ten minutes later, the battle began. No one on the patio was spared any of the details, until Tod remembered the glass doors to the balcony and slammed them shut.

Emily was replacing a bulb in the lower hall when Ann Haynes came out of 5B, suitcase in hand, and started down the stairs. Tod was at her heels.

"This is insane!" he roared. "I went out to celebrate the book's being accepted. I meant to pick you up at the office, but I met an old pal—"

"Not such an old pal, according to what I heard!" Ann called over her shoulder.

"What you heard? What did you hear? It's a lie!"

"I have a witness. You'll find out in court!"

Tod came bounding down the stairs.

"I won't let you go, Ann," he insisted. "I won't let you leave me!"

But Ann left, figuratively slamming the door in Tod's face. He cursed under his breath, turned and saw Emily on the ladder. He looked at her strangely for several seconds, and then stalked back upstairs.

The look Tod had given Emily the day Ann left him was a smile compared to the sullen glare she absorbed and held with her, along with the tenant's morning mail. No one had ever given her such a fright; no one, certainly, had ever tried to run her down in the driveway. She wanted to discuss it with someone; but Sam was still asleep, and when the patio regulars appeared, Mr. Abrams buried himself behind his newspaper, and Mrs. Abrams found delight in a new letter from Robert. Fanny Brady had a new magazine, and the normalcy that came to Roxbury Haven deceived Emily into believing the two incidents were of no importance. She returned to work on the roses, only to become uneasily aware that somebody was staring at the nape of her neck. She turned, slowly. Tod Haynes was out on the balcony of 5B. He didn't have a cup of coffee; he wasn't smoking a cigarette. He was staring at her in that same malevolent manner. And even

when she faced him, boldly, he continued to stare. Had she been inclined to believe such things, Emily would have thought he had the Evil Eye.

After awhile, Tod went inside. Emily was relieved until that strange feeling came again, the uneasy feeling of being watched. She glanced up at the balcony. No one was there.

"Emily—"

She whirled about. Tod Haynes was standing not two feet away. It was all Emily could do to refrain from screaming.

"Oh, did I frighten you, dear?" he said warmly. "I'm sorry."

Emily was temporarily paralyzed. In spite of his familiarity with other women, Tod had never addressed her by her first name. As if that wasn't enough, he took her arm and drew her toward him.

"I just came down," he said, "to see if you would ask Sam to help me get my trunk from the garage."

"Your trunk?" Emily echoed, weakly. "Are you going away?"

Then Tod Haynes smiled in a strange and frightening way.

"We never know, do we, Emily?" he said.

Sam picked up the lunch pail and started for the door. Emily thought he was going to leave

without saying anything at all. At the doorway, he looked back.

"Haynes actually tried to run you down?" he asked.

"This morning in the driveway. And I'm not making it up. The postman saw it, too. And, Sam, if you had seen the way he looked at me at the mail boxes—"

"Have you been reading other people's postcards again?"

"I wasn't *reading* anything! And then a little while ago—out on the patio." Emily lowered her voice. "He was so *familiar*."

"With you?" Sam asked.

Emily didn't like the sound of his voice. He wasn't impressed. Maybe she did look at the mail sometimes, but it was only to see where the postmarks were from. Some people had interesting friends in interesting places, not just a husband who didn't care if she was threatened and insulted.

"The way he *looks* at me," she said. "Sam, I think the divorce has affected his mind."

"He seemed all right when I took his trunk up," Sam said. "I don't know why a divorce should bother a man."

"Sam Proctor!"

But Sam was completely unsympathetic. As he turned and left her, he said, "And I've got a piece of advice for you, Emily. Don't stand around in driveways."

Sam went to work and wouldn't be back until after midnight. Emily was left with her doubts, which she tried to reason away. Mrs. Haynes had left in a rush, carrying only a bag. It wasn't unreasonable to think she'd left things behind to be packed. She listened to the sound of the trunk being dragged across the floor upstairs, and it seemed that noises were much sharper now.

A little later, another strange thing happened. Emily heard Tod Haynes come down the stairs. He went out on the patio and began to talk to old Mr. Abrams, who had been setting in the sun alone. Nobody ever talked to Mr. Abrams. Emily's curiosity compelled her to go outside.

"... thirty-seven years," the old man was saying, excitedly. "Thirty-seven years in the hardware business. Tools, plumbing fixtures. Yes, sir. Anything you want to know about in the hardware line, I can tell you."

"Where can I buy a good saw?" Tod asked.

"All kinds of saws," Mr. Abrams said. "What kind of saw do you want?"

Tod hesitated. He turned slowly and saw Emily standing a few yards away. He looked at her steadily, until she began to have the same sensation she had experi-

enced when he looked down at her from the balcony.

"What do you want the saw for?" Mr. Abrams prodded.

"When something is too large," Tod said, still staring at Emily, "it has to be cut down."

Then he walked away without saying anything more to anyone. When he came back, he carried a new saw and a coil of rope. Emily didn't see him again until after dark. In the meantime, she listened. She listened for the sound of the saw and heard nothing. She listened for the sound of the trunk and heard nothing. What she did hear was the sound of pacing. Heavy, thoughtful pacing. When she was very quiet, all the sounds in the building were magnified. She heard Patti Parr come downstairs and go off on a date. The Smiths came home. Harry Stokes came home and went out again. Still, overhead, the pacing. Once it stopped and she heard the shower run for just a few seconds. Later, there was the sound of a glass breaking in the kitchen. A few minutes later, she heard heavy footsteps come down the stairs and stop at her door. Emily didn't know she was so tense until the bell rang.

She opened the door and faced Tod Haynes.

"Emily," he said. And then he

smiled, strangely. "I knew you would be waiting by the door."

He had been drinking. His hair was mussed and his tie awry. When he took a step forward, she leaned on the door.

"Don't be afraid of me, Emily," he said. "I'm not going to come in." He carried a bundle which he shifted from one arm to another. "Laundry," he explained. "Keep forgetting to take it out now that I'm a bachelor again . . . Emily, I know how you notice things, so I thought I'd save you some trouble. There's a woman coming to my apartment tonight. No, don't say anything yet," he protested, as her mouth opened. "I'm telling you because she may come while I'm out; and I don't want you worrying your mind about it. You worry about all of us so much."

When Emily found her voice, it was unexpectedly shrill.

"Mr. Haynes," she said, "you've been drinking."

"I know," Tod answered. "It's terrible, isn't it? I have all kinds of bad habits—like giving a pretty girl a ride when her car won't start."

"And not coming back until the next day!"

Tod beamed. "There, I knew you hadn't missed that! Who else could have known, I asked myself. Who else but dear Emily?"

There was nothing happy in his smile. Behind it, in his eyes, was that same look that had frightened her all day.

"Mr. Haynes," she said firmly, "you can't blame me for your misconduct."

"Indeed I can't," he confessed. "Indeed I can't. But when the woman I'm expecting comes—if she comes before I get back—just close your eyes and let her go upstairs unmolested—please. She'll have a key. She's only coming to pick up her trunk."

"Do you mean it's your wife?" Emily asked.

Tod shook his head sadly.

"Emily, dear," he said. "I have no wife . . ."

His words trailed behind him as he walked away. Not until he was gone did Emily begin to wonder how Ann Haynes was going to carry that large trunk downstairs.

It was almost two hours later that Emily heard the sound of footsteps on the patio. She scurried to the window and peeked out to see Mrs. Haynes, wearing her familiar hooded raincoat, enter the building. The footsteps went up the stairs. Moments later, the door opened and Mrs. Haynes walked inside. She proceeded slowly through the apartment. Emily waited for the sound of the trunk

that didn't come. After a few moments, the footsteps went out on the balcony. Quietly, Emily slid open her door. Now she caught the smell of a cigarette. Then the sound came—a quick gasp of surprise.

"I thought you were smarter than that," Tod said quietly. "Did you think I was going to let you get away with it?"

There was no time for an answer. While Emily stood frozen below, thinking Tod must have returned without her knowing it, there was a dull thud, a scraping sound and the quick closing of the glass doors. Simultaneously, a tiny red spark spiraled down from above and dropped at her feet. She picked it up. It was a cigarette, still smouldering and marked with lip rouge.

Emily hurried inside and locked the door behind her. She hardly dared to breathe. Her mind raced back over the day: the anger in Tod's face when he came home from court; the incident in the driveway; his strange changes of mood; the trunk, the rope and the saw—At that point her mind balked. Then she heard the sounds again: a scuffling, something that might have been a chair being moved, a crash—finally, a heavy thud that made the ceiling shudder.

She waited. It was all over. No. Now the pacing began again. When it stopped, she heard the trunk being dragged across the floor; after that, more pacing. Then the shower began to run—hard. It ran for a long time. What was the shower for? To wash away—what? Alone in her world of sounds, Emily panicked. She ran to the telephone. The police? She hesitated. That might be brash. Sam. Yes, she'd call Sam at work and try to make him understand. And then she stopped, telephone in hand. The shower was still running, but now there was a closer sound. The door directly above slammed shut, and heavy footsteps came down the stairs. They stopped in front of her door, and there was a silence of several seconds before they slowly walked away. Emily dropped the telephone into the cradle and hurried to the window. Tod Haynes was crossing the patio. His shoulders sagged and his head was down, and under one arm he carried something wrapped in a newspaper. It could have been a saw.

Emily was terrified, but she had to know. She waited until he disappeared down the driveway; then she got the pass key. She slipped upstairs unnoticed and unlocked the door of 5B. Inside, all was darkness except for the light show-

ing in the bathroom. She waited until her eyes adjusted to the shadows. Standing near the door was a trunk. Around it, tied tightly, was the rope. Hanging from the rope was a shipping tag addressed—as she could see by the light from the bathroom—to Mrs. Haynes. She moved forward, giving the trunk a wide margin. The bathroom was a magnet. Proceeding toward it, her foot touched something glittering on the floor. She picked it up. It was a liquor glass, still smelling of whisky.

Emily stepped inside the bathroom. The shower was going at full pressure; steam billowed over the top of the enclosure until it was difficult to see across the small room. She had to learn what was behind those frosted doors; but, for the moment, she was paralyzed. Nowhere in her journey to the shower had she seen anything of Mrs. Haynes.

But Emily wasn't alone in the apartment. She knew that the instant the bathroom door slammed shut behind her. She screamed and whirled about. The doorknob was still turning. She grabbed it with both hands and pulled with all her strength against whoever might be outside—trying to pull it open—until her fingers found the lock

...

Emily's scream was penetrating,

and it went on for a long time. Long enough for all the residents of Roxbury Haven to crowd outside apartment 5B, where they stood helpless before a locked door until Tod Haynes came bounding up the stairs two steps at a time. As he hurriedly unlocked the door, the two policemen Fanny Brady had thoughtfully summoned from a passing patrol car, shouldered through the group. They went directly to the bathroom, the source of the now weakening screams, and pounded on the door with an authority that brought response. Bedraggled, dripping and babbling hysterically, Emily emerged from the steaming interior.

"Why, Mrs. Proctor," Tod exclaimed, "whatever have you been doing in my shower?"

She stared at him—horrified.

"Murderer!" she gasped.

All around Emily was a tight ring of faces—her incredulous and astonished tenants. Nobody seemed to understand.

"Murderer!" she repeated. "He cut her up in the shower with a saw. He's got her remains stuffed in a trunk!"

Tod Haynes said nothing at all. One of the policemen went into the bathroom and turned off the shower, revealing a stall completely free of bloodstains or bone frag-

ments. The saw was found on the kitchen sink.

"I got it to trim that magnolia branch hanging over the balcony," Tod explained. "It's been knocking me in the head for a year."

Now everything seemed to be happening in a dream. One of the officers peeked outside and came back rubbing his forehead where it had contacted the magnolia tree. That left only the trunk—which was opened to reveal nothing but Mrs. Haynes clothing, including the hooded raincoat. While truth seeped slowly through the confusion in Emily's mind, Tod casually lit a cigarette, glanced at the mouthpiece and then wiped the last trace of lipstick from a corner of his mouth.

"It was you!" Emily cried. "You're the one who came back! You're Mrs. Haynes!"

Everybody stared at Emily, strangely.

"I think we've got a live one,"

said the officer who took Emily's arm. "Come along, lady. I know a nice doctor who'll enjoy talking to you."

Emily was helpless. She felt herself being drawn along through the group of her astonished tenants, and she knew Tod Haynes had contrived the whole affair in order to discredit her. Nobody, she was sure, would ever believe anything she said again.

But at the doorway, they were stopped by a man in a raincoat who was almost as confused as Emily.

"I've been ringing the bell downstairs," he said, "but nobody answers. I've got a subpoena for—" He paused to read from the paper in his hand. "—Mrs. Emily Proctor—witness: Haynes versus Haynes."

Emily looked quickly at Tod—in time to catch what no one else saw or could have understood: a smile of deep satisfaction.



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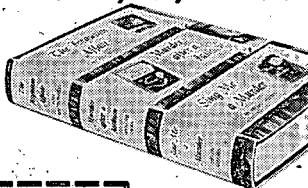
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